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Kent on Sunday

www.kentnews.co.uk February 14, 2016

East edition No 699

GOVERNMENT

KCC confirms council tax bill hike

Find out how much more you will be paying this year

POLICE

Fergus Wilson faces mounting criticism

PCC candidate blasted for 'xenophobic' comments

JUSTICE

Prison plans are slammed

Guards in county say Tories are to blame for service's rapid decline

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Don't fall into trap that migrants are only EU issue

THERE is a troubling aspect of the upcoming propaganda over the European referendum - and that is that both sides of the In/Out argument are using migrants as the ultimate threat.

There seemed rather heavy irony this week when the 'let's stick two fingers up at Brussels' brigade quickly jumped on the prime minister's comments that the Calais 'Jungle' could up sticks and move to the Kent coast if we opted to turn our back on the union. The word 'scaremongering' was liberally sprinkled amid the condemnation.

But it wasn't so long ago when Nigel Farage was telling us all that 29 million Bulgarians and Romanians would be hot-footing it in our direction to steal our jobs, women - and any other stereotype you care to throw at Johnny Foreigner - when they were given the same rights to work across the EU as we enjoy. That was two years ago. It's worth noting, just for the record, comfortably less than one per cent of that figure are now over here working (around 217,000 according to the latest statistics, since you ask).

But the more troubling issue is if the In/Out debate is dictated by good old-fashioned xenophobia. Bizarrely, the mood towards eastern European migrants seems to have softened considerably. Just don't get those politicians started on those Syrians or Africans.

But Europe - and our part of the union set up to stop a repeat of the Second World War - is about far, far, more than the migrant issue. So we must all guard against that swaying us when it comes to entering the voting booth. It's an element, certainly, but you may wish to question your own views if it's the be-all and end-all.

Editor **Chris Britcher**

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PAGE 11 »

PAGE 12 »

PAGE 19 »

PAGE 05 »

PAGE 14 »

PAGE 41 »

Contents

News

05 **Decision on street lights**
Results of KCC debate on controversial issue

08 **Resignation over tunnel**
Anger over Gravesham Thames crossing plan

11 **Council tax is on the rise**
Find out how much more your bill will be

12 **Fury over Fergus bid**
PCC wannabe hits back in migrants row

14 **'Killer' doubt rises again**
Bellfield speculation re-opens Stone debate

19 **Try rugby Freemasons**
Latest lodge in county has sporting theme

20 **Reviving our prisons**
But will PM's plans be too little too late?

37 **Valentine's warnings**
Don't be ripped off on this special day by firms hiking up their prices sky-high

PAGE 23 »

38 **Backpacking criticism**
Has student pursuit got too commercial?

Pure Weddings

23 **Get set for your big day**
All your need to know about tying the knot

Arts & Leisure

41 **Sam Bailey in Chicago**
Star-studded musical heads in to county

Plus

Letters ..... Page 48

HOW TO CONTACT US...
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Stories which made the headlines @kentnews.co.uk during the past week

Street lights to be turned back on from next month

By Tom Pyman
tom.pyman@archant.co.uk

RETURNING: The lights will go back on...but this time they'll be energy efficient LED lamps

A PROPOSAL to return to all-night street lighting across the county, and to introduce energy-efficient Light Emitting Diode (LED) lamps, has been approved by Kent County Council.

At a meeting of its environment and transport cabinet committee on Friday, members voted in favour of the proposals, which are set to change the way the county's roads are illuminated.

It comes after results of a public consultation revealed that 63 per cent of residents preferred the idea of all-night lighting, rather than part-night lighting at the current level.

Work will begin on changing the 118,000 lamps from next month, which the council claims will save Kent taxpayers up to £5.2m a year, with the first installation to take place in Ashford.

The work is expected to be completed across Kent over 38 months, with streets becoming lit overnight as and when each job is finished.

The newly-upgraded lighting will be connected to one central management system (CMS) that will allow the authority to monitor and provide optimal lighting levels in the future.

This will therefore allow different levels of lighting on residential streets to country roads, as well as sensitive areas of the county which need to be protected from such light.

Potential health concerns, as featured in last week's KoS, were dispelled by the KCC committee, which insisted all necessary care had been taken to ensure they were fit for purpose.

LED street lighting programme manager, Robert Clark, confirmed that the correlated colour temperature (CCT) of the lights would be between 4000K and 4500K.

This will producing a "neutral white" light, rather than 'orange' or 'blue,' that is both energy-efficient and environmentally sound.

He admitted that while there is always risk when exposed to lighting, as there is when using smartphones and tablets, the council has ensured it is absolutely minimal.

Cabinet member for environment and transport Matthew Balfour added: "It's a good news story and people are getting what they want. We hope to get it right first time, but there is the opportunity for people to come to us and request changes."

Sales slump sees latest Hornby finances hit the buffers with big loss

EMBATTLED model rail firm Hornby warned over mounting losses after a "disappointing" start to the new year hit recovery hopes – an announcement which saw 45 per cent wiped off its share price.

The group – whose brands also include Scalextric, Airfix and Corgi – said UK trading was far worse than expected in January as its new year promotions failed to boost flagging sales.

It has its headquarters at the Discovery Park in Sandwich, after moving out of its long-time home in Margate.

It now expects to post "substantially" wider underlying pre-tax losses for the full year, at between £5.5 million to £6m, and revealed a £1m write-off after reviewing its stock and balance sheet.

Hornby said it was now in talks with its lender as the scale of losses could see the firm breach its banking agreements.

The group admitted the new year woes marked a "substantial setback in our recovery plan", as it had hoped to turn the corner after a tough past few years that have seen the firm beset by troubles.

It had suffered major disruption from new computer and stock management systems, while European trading was also impacted by troubles with suppliers in China.

The group had seen buoyant trading in the run up to Christmas, when like-for-like sales rose 17 per cent throughout November and December, according to Hornby.

But trading since the start of the new year has been in "stark contrast", it added.

It said while UK trading is expected to improve in February and March, sales will still be "significantly" behind previous expectations.

Richard Ames, chief executive, said: "Undoubtedly this is a disappointing result, but we have a strong portfolio of brands that we are determined to see flourish."

In December, Hornby posted half-year losses of £4.5m.

Caroline Andrews murder suspect back in hospital

A 54-year-old man detained by police following the death of Caroline Andrews in Benenden, returned to hospital on Wednesday - just 24 hours after being discharged and taken into police custody.

The death is currently being treated as a murder inquiry.

The 52-year-old's body was discovered by police at an address in The Street, Benenden, last Thursday. The man arrested forms part of that investigation.

Police had led a county-wide hunt for a man they wanted to quiz in connection with her death, which involved armed police searching a train in Gillingham last Thursday.

He was found in London on Friday and taken to hospital for treatment to injuries he had sustained.

Ann Barnes' delight after force is rated 'outstanding'

KENT Police has been given the only 'outstanding' rating of any force in the country in a report issued this week by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC).

The report rated the nation's 43 forces on how good they are at keeping people safe and reducing crime. Of 43 forces, Kent was the only force to be judged to be worth of the top 'outstanding' rating.

Police and crime commissioner for the county, Ann Barnes, said she was 'delighted' at the outcome.

She said: ''In all my experience of the policing world, I can't remember any HMIC inspection when just one force has been singled out for a top-grading like this. This is unique, and great news for Kent Police.''

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seven days

Stories which made the headlines @kentnews.co.uk during the past week

Claims Tories overspent in election campaigns

SPENDING by the Conservative Party in two key seats in last May's general election are under investigations over allegations they over spent strict limits.

Channel 4 News claimed hotel bills and advertising costs were not included in local spending returns.

Two seats in Kent identified included the hotly contested constituencies of South Thanet, which Tory Craig Mackinlay won, narrowly beating Ukip leader Nigel Farage, and Rochester and Strood, which saw Tory Kelly Tolhurst win the seat from Ukip's Mark Reckless. One claim was for more than £4,000 for Tory HQ staff to stay at Margate's Premier Inn while on the campaign trail. The Tories say all spending was within limits and in accordance with legislation.

Three courts to close as Ministry of Justice says axe will fall to save £500m

By Luke May

ALL three Kent courts facing the axe as part of a major consultation and review of the justice system, are to close, it was confirmed this week.

That means the magistrates' courts in both Dartford and Dover will shut - in addition to the county and family court at Tunbridge Wells.

The announcement was made on Thursday by Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service and follows a consultation period which ended in October.

Nationwide, some 91 courts and tribunals across England and Wales faced closure – with another 31 to be integrated or merged.

Ministers behind the plans say a third of courts lay empty for 50 per cent of the time, and that by streamlining the service it can save £500million. The Law Society say the move reduces easy access to justice.

Justice minister Shailesh Vara said: "Our courts and tribunal system is in need of urgent reform.

CLOSING: Part of justice changes

Maintaining our underused and dilapidated court buildings costs the taxpayer £500m a year but some courts sit for less than half the time available.

"This is simply unsustainable. Closing these courts in poor quality buildings will raise £40m to re-invest in the justice system, and save hard-working taxpayers £27m per year.

"The decision to close a court is never taken lightly, but in the digital age I am confident we have measures in place to ensure access to justice is not diminished."

Dartford's court is expected to close before June this year, while Tunbridge Wells and Dover's courts will be closed between October and December this year. The Tunbridge Wells court will close once "suitable alternative local provision" is identified.

Dartford's Conservative MP Gareth Johnson: "This news comes as a disappointment as it will mean longer journeys for those attending court.

"Anybody who has been in that building will know it is very dilapidated and would need a lot of investment to bring it up to modern standards.

"I suspect the Ministry of Justice felt cost was a big factor in this decision. Whilst I would have preferred they kept the court open, I recognise the need to protect the taxpayer."

VICTIM: Sian Blake

Partner of TV actress charged with murder

POLICE have charged a man with the murders of ex-EastEnders actress Sian Blake and her two children.

Arthur Simpson-Kent, aged 48, was detained by Metropolitan Police officers at Heathrow Airport after arriving on a flight from Ghana.

He was taken to a west London police station and charged on Friday afternoon.

Ms Blake and her sons Zachary, eight, and four-year-old Amon vanished on December 13 and were found buried in the garden of their family home in Erith on January 5.

Mr Simpson-Kent was the partner of the former television actress.

He appeared before magistrates on Friday and was remanded in custody.

Scotland Yard is under investigation by the police watchdog for the way it handled the missing persons inquiry and why it took more than three weeks to find the bodies of Ms Blake and her sons.

The back garden of the house was only thoroughly searched in early January after murder squad detectives were called in.

Ms Blake played Frankie Pierre in 56 episodes of EastEnders between 1996 and 1997.

She was suffering from motor neurone disease before she died.

Theresa May rejects Stack cash call again

HOME secretary Theresa May has refused to reconsider Whitehall footing the £600,000 bill for the extra costs incurred by Kent Police last year for Operation Stack.

Mrs May had already rejected the call, made by Kent police and crime commissioner Ann Barnes, last month. And when asked to reconsider she rejected it again leaving Mrs Barnes to say the decision was "simply not fair".

Mrs May reiterated that the amount claimed for – less than £600,000 – did not meet the threshold criteria for Special Grant funding; the funding stream suggested by her officials and the only mechanism available.

Ann Barnes, said: "There is no other funding stream to access so, when Operation Stack happens again, we shall be in exactly the same position where Kent taxpayers are expected to pick up the extra policing costs for a national emergency.

"As a matter of principle, it is simply not fair."

Diversions in place for resurfacing on A2

MOTORISTS are being warned to expect delays and diversions on the A2 between Bean and Ebbsfleet this week as resurfacing work gets under way.

Sections of the coastbound A2 will be resurfaced which will mean four weeks of overnight carriageway or slip road closures.

Highways England asset manager for Kent, Kevin Bown, explained: "We have carefully planned the work to take place overnight, when we know traffic flows are lowest to minimise disruption."

The work will take place overnight, between 9pm and 5am.

The coastbound A2 will be closed at two locations in different phases, with access to Bluewater shopping centre and Ebbsfleet station from the diversion route, on separate nights. The coastbound A2 will be closed between the Bean (B255) and Ebbsfleet (B259) junctions. A diversion will be in place via the B255, A226 and B259.

The coastbound A2 will be closed between the exit and entry slip roads at the Bean junction.

Electronic scanners for blood labelling

BLOOD sample bottles are now being labelled electronically at east Kent's biggest hospitals, in a pilot initiative to improve safety and efficiency.

Staff at A&E departments at Ashford's William Harvey and Margate's QEQM hospitals, have swapped pens for smart bedside technology which prints labels directly from a patient's identity wristband.

The pilot has also recently launched at the Kent and Canterbury Hospital.

The health trust which runs the hospitals says nurses are already finding that electronic labelling saves approximately 10 minutes per patient.

As well as being quicker, the new process reduces the possibility of error and of samples being rejected due to unclear labelling.

Angela Green, blood transfusion coordinator at East Kent Hospitals, said: "Introducing this innovative technology supports our teams and provides quality assurances and improvements to patient safety and care."

If successful, it will be rolled out to other hospitals in the trust during the year.

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Ten hour queues as bridge is closed after storm sweeps in

By Tom Pyman
tom.pyman@archant.co.uk

STORM Imogen caused horrendous traffic problems on Monday as its high winds swept across the county, closing both the QEII Bridge at Dartford and the Sheppey Crossing.

But it was at Dartford where motorists really felt the agony, with cars stuck in jams for ten hours.

With main route for motorists travelling from Essex to Kent closed due to the high winds, all traffic was diverted via the tunnel.

But as the M25 felt the strain, traffic snarled up. And for those who had travelled to the Lakeside shopping centre in Thurrock, it meant a hellish journey home.

Truck driver Brian Sears said: "I've been working around the M25 and the area of the crossing for 25 years and the Storm Imogen delays were the worst I've ever seen.

"Dartford just can't cope with that volume of traffic and it's the result of successive governments letting us down by not putting the right infrastructure in place.

"Other proposed crossings in Belvedere and Gravesend are coming decades too late."

Issac Pevy, from Ashford, said: "I was dropping my girlfriend back in Essex and left about 2pm, thinking it would be fine - it wasn't. We were stuck in crawling traffic for over six hours, before eventually getting there about 8.20pm - it was crazy.

"Some people started getting out of their cars because it was just gridlock – I've never seen anything like it."

MP for Dartford Gareth Johnson revealed his frustration and insisted that another crossing east of Gravesend would help solve the ongoing problems.

He said: "Yet again Dartford has fallen victim to Britain's worst stretch of road.

"The congestion this week at the crossing and around the local area was horrendous and highlights the necessity for another crossing away from Dartford.

"It also shows that the new crossing needs to be another tunnel and not a bridge.

"I accept that crossing the bridge in windy conditions can be dangerous but it is also dangerous for people to be trapped in their cars for hours on end."

An eight-week consultation into a tunnel east of Gravesend is currently under way.

SHUT: The QEII Bridge at Dartford was closed for much of Monday due to bad weather

Evacuation at County Hall after electric fault

COUNTY Hall in Maidstone was evacuated on Tuesday morning after an electrical fault triggered the building's extinguisher system.

Fire crews were called to the headquarters of Kent County Council just after 11.15am this morning.

A fire crew spokesman said: "The extinguisher system is believed to have been caused by a fault in a small electrical component." No one was hurt.

Call for sites as town looks to the future

TUNBRIDGE Wells Borough Council is calling on landowners to identify sites for future development as it prepares its new local plan.

The plan will act as a blueprint for development in and around the borough up to 2033.

All sites will be assessed for possible housing or economic development.

Sporting valuations

AN EXPERT in sporting memorabilia will be on hand to price up your prized football shirts or golf clubs on Monday.

Graham Budd will be at Tunbridge Wells Golf Club on Langton Road to give free valuations on items from any sport. His auction house works in association with Sotheby's to put rare sporting items under the hammer.

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Trust boss fury at claims he backed contract imposition

A SENIOR health chief at the county's biggest NHS trust has distanced himself from a letter he signed, telling the government to do "whatever it deems necessary" to end the long-running pay dispute with junior doctors.

It comes after health minister Jeremy Hunt took the decision to impose a new contract after months of negotiations which had culminated in strike action – the latest on Tuesday.

In announcing the contract move, Mr Hunt mentioned the letter to demonstrate support.

But Matthew Kershaw, chief executive of the East Kent Hospital University NHS Foundation Trust, which runs the William Harvey, QEQM and Kent and Canterbury hospitals, says his signature did not mean imposition was necessary.

He said: "I agreed to sign the letter, considering the progress which has been made and the importance of reaching a solution. However, I was not asked whether I think this contract should now be imposed."

Former Maidstone GP Dr Paul Hobday and campaigner against a perceived privatisation of the NHS, said: "I have never seen a workforce so united and angry."

County councillor quits in row over tunnel plans

GRAVESHAM county councillor Bryan Sweetland has resigned from his post on Kent County Council's cabinet, in opposition to plans to build a lower Thames crossing east of Gravesend.

The Tory councillor, who was the cabinet member for commercial and trade services, claimed Highways England's proposals would cause "the worst devastation in the area since the last world war."

Last month, a consultation was launched on after Highways England chose the Gravesham option over that of an alternative at Dartford.

The Gravesham Rural councillor said he could not stay in the cabinet while KCC seemed likely to support the recommendation.

He said: "It would have been difficult to stay in the cabinet while representing the people of Gravesham. I think the whole consultation is pretty poor, they're running the consultation with events in places like Maidstone, but have refused to have on in the villages of Chalk and Higham, which are two main areas affected by the proposals.

"The proposals are recommending huge changes to roads and local infrastructure in north Kent, its going to cause the worst devastation since the last world war."

Under the consultation, a road could be built from the start of the M2, heading north past villages such as Higham, Shorne and Chalk, before a bored tunnel heads across the tunnel.

And here is the news...

ITV newsreader Alastair Stewart will be the next big name taking part in the University of Kent's In Conversation series next weekend.

He will be joined by the uni's chancellor, Gavin Esler at the Woolf Lecture Theatre in Canterbury at 6.30pm. Entry is free.

Teaching safer web use

NEARLY 100 children from primary schools across the county gathered at the Kent Police College in Maidstone on Tuesday as part of Safer Internet Day.

The police were joined by representatives from KCC and the NSPCC to remind youngsters to be respectful online.

Graffiti crackdown

POLICE in Edenbridge are asking members of the public to help tackle a recent spate of graffiti in the town.

A number of incidents have recently been reported in areas including Fircroft Way and the Spittals Cross estate. Additional police patrols are being deployed.

Whitstable water meters

WATER meters are being fitted to all homes in Whitstable and the surrounding area from spring.

South East Water will be providing more information about the changes at a special drop-in session this Thursday at the Horsebridge Centre between 2pm and 5pm.

Celebrating 25 years of Care & Support
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All rooms at Bridge Haven are bright and cheerful with many bedrooms having en-suite facilities providing relaxation and a sense of well-being.

Other facilities include the 'Snug' – a pub like facility for residents to enjoy and socialise and Gregory's tea room, situated in one of the two attractively laid gardens.

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Top Three Stories

1. Sevenoaks bomb scare

A 73-year-old man was arrested

2. Chaos on the tracks

There were severe delays on Friday

3. University march

Students stand up to far-right group

The Essential Guide:

...to the Dartford Crossing

Everything you need to know about the Dart Charge

FEATURED PHOTO GALLERY: Folkestone Gurkhas prepare for deployment in Afghanistan, with 400 being sent to Kabul in April. See page 35 of this issue for more images.

Missed last week's...?

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Top Three Blogs

1. Rehabilitation reform

Prisons take a step in the right direction

2. Lorry lane needed

Why HGV drivers cause us stress

3. Etiquette dilemmas

Say thanks when someone holds the door

Results of the *KoS* Online Poll

Should Southeastern retain its contract?

1. Yes - 16%
2. No - 79%
3. Undecided - 0%
4. Don't care - 5%

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D-DAY: KCC leader Paul Carter saw the budget for 2016/17 approved as protesters gathered outside County Hall to complain about cuts to services and more job cuts

Critics fume as council tax rises and more jobs to be lost at KCC

Tom Pyman on Thursday's debate at County Hall which saw the council again face huge funding cuts

KENT County Council's slice of your council tax bill is set to rise by close to four per cent after the council rubber-stamped the budget for 2016/17 this week.

While KCC will join most local authorities in taking the maximum 1.99 per cent slice of that rise, the remaining two per cent would go into a separate pot for social care, as outlined by the chancellor George Osborne in his autumn statement.

The council tax rise – comfortably the largest part of the bill – comes amid yet more significant cuts in the funding KCC receives from Whitehall.

But critics rounded on the price hike – describing it as "morally wrong" that Kent taxpayers have to foot the bill for central government's grant cuts.

Another casualty will be, as expected, 150 jobs. The authority has already shed some 2,000 over recent years. Union bosses blasted the loss of staff.

Conservative leader Paul Carter delivered the budget proposals to councillors in the chamber, before a majority voted in approval.

Draft details had been released last month and a consultation took place to gauge public opinion on where the limited resources should go.

There was some good news – the day before the debate, Tunbridge Wells MP and local government minister Greg Clark confirmed KCC would receive an extra £5.7m to its budget as final figures for local authorities – delivered via the local government finance settlement – were confirmed.

Cllr Carter said the additional funds made things "slightly more bearable" but the theme was still of less money to go round.

He told the debate on Thursday at County Hall: "I think we've put out an intelligent budget.

"Government grants to support local government services have reduced dramatically.

"This county council budget four years ago was in excess of £1.1bn, which will now shortly reduce to £890m.

"This represents over a £200m reduction – some 20 per cent of our budget – whilst at the same time containing demand pressures on our services, predominantly beyond our control, amounting to some £230m.

"And incredibly with no substantive service reductions and indeed in many cases, improving the quality of our services with £430m savings delivered.

"It is regrettable that we have to put council tax up but we have no choice. It is essential if we are to maintain frontline services."

The rise will see the KCC element of the charge on a Band C property – which makes up the majority of the county's homes – go from £966.88 to £988.24 and will bring in an additional £11m towards spending demands across all council services.

When taking into account the social care levy, the Band C rate increases to £1,007.60, raising a further £11m specifically to meet the pressures on social care budgets.

Both rises will help the authority tackle the imminent challenge of the National Living Wage, which will be introduced from April, and increases in employers' National Insurance contributions.

With almost £80m of cuts needing to be made this year alongside the increased tax revenue, the council claims the impact on frontline services is minimal, with £44m of that deficit being made up through streamlining services.

Some £26m will be cut from debt management, financing and use of reserves, while £7m of additional income will arrive from commercial services.

Around £2m will be slashed from the highways maintenance budget, although KCC hopes the chancellor's dedicated pothole fund will help fill that particular hole, with an additional £400,000 saved from a reduction in member grants.

Cllr Carter also warned of £160m of savings needing to be found in next year's budget, which he said "without a shadow of a doubt will be the most challenging the authority has ever faced."

Opposition leaders slammed the council tax rise, with one councillor describing it as 'morally wrong'.

Ukip leader Roger Latchford said: "The Conservative government is expecting this council to do more with less money, which means the burden is placed on residents through continual council tax increases.

"We've heard from the prime minister that we're all in this together - tell that to the people of Kent who are suffering the increased burden of taxation, either directly or indirectly.

"Some of our residents are finding it difficult to manage that is why it is essential we reduce unnecessary expenditure.

"This government passes the additional cost of care to this council - once again it is increasing the burden on those who can least afford it.

"It is morally wrong in this dire economic climate to pass this onto Kent residents."

Labour leader on the council, Gordon Cowan, said confirmation of the final settlement from Whitehall "was left so late it is treating local government with utter contempt".

He added: "Our view has always been to ensure as far as possible we help those on lower and middle incomes who are dependent on local government services and have most to lose from cutbacks."

Liberal Democrat leader Trudy Dean added: "In living memory there has never been a change in the budget as a result of this meeting. This budget is cruelly targeted on elderly and vulnerable."

However, she did feel Paul Carter had upped his game to fight the council's corner.

She added: "I criticised Cllr Carter in previous months for not standing up on behalf of KCC, and other councils, to the Conservative government, and am pleased to have seen the increased robustness of his challenge in recent months."

Unions organised demonstrations outside of the venue - both opposing cuts and campaigning against the proposed closure of Folkestone's Pent Valley school.

Branch secretary of the Unite union, Eric Segal, said: "These budget cuts driven by a Tory government will have an adverse effect on much needed essential services such as schools and libraries.

"Increasing the council tax means we are having to pay for the incompetence of people like Paul Carter who have relentlessly cut our services in recent years.

"The 150 job losses come on top of 2,000 that have already been cut over the past five years.

"It's not just the person losing their job, and their family that are affected, but the Kent community and economy as a whole.

"They then can't afford to buy things from local shops and services and that's why these are closing down as well."

■ What do you think of the rise in council tax? Should Whitehall be paying KCC more? Have you noticed a decline in services? Share your views and join the debate - email us at editorial@kosmedia.co.uk or write to: The Editor, KoS, Kent House, 81 Station Road, Ashford TN23 1PP.

PCC hopeful blasted over 'xenophobic' reward plan

Controversial landlord Fergus Wilson has been attacked by support groups and other candidates for his tough stance on handling influx of migrants

TROUBLE: Fergus Wilson, bottom left, is under fire over offering up to £20,000 for a shop-an-illegal-immigrant plan

By Luke May
luke.may@archant.co.uk

PROPOSALS from police and crime commissioner hopeful Fergus Wilson have been slammed by a migrant support group, stating his manifesto "encourages racism".

Further criticism has come from potential opponents in the election, who have branded a proposed reward scheme for illegal immigrants as "xenophobic".

The former landlord, who is selling off his Maidstone and Ashford property portfolio for £250million, has put his own name forward for the role of the police and crime commissioner.

The role, which exists to hold the police to account, is currently held by Ann Barnes.

But recent proposals in Mr Wilson's manifesto have caused a stir from migrant support groups, after he pledged to reward the public with up to £20,000 in an attempt to stop illegal immigrants coming in to the county.

In a recent advertisement, Mr Wilson published the following comments: "East Europeans [sic] from the EU are currently legal immigrants.

"Others are illegal immigrants seeking employment by entering the 'black economy of Kent' and taking British jobs.

"Fergus Wilson will introduce a reward system of £1,000 for reporting illegal immigrants in Kent, £10,000 for reporting a landlord housing illegal immigrants in Kent and £20,000 for reporting lorry drivers smuggling in illegal immigrants."

The possible introduction has drawn criticism from Samphire, a Dover-based support group.

Initially setup to provide support for detainees at Dover Immigrant Removal Centre, the group now provides support for ex-detainees at such centres.

Christine Oliver, a manager at the charity, branded the proposals as "divisive", claiming Mr Wilson showed a "lack of understanding" on immigration.

She said: "Mr Wilson's categorisation of migrants is simplistic and inaccurate.

"This lack of knowledge serves to fuel the negative misconceptions about migration that Samphire is working against.

"Britain has a proud tradition of providing protection to those in need.

"Getting people to dob on their neighbours, because they may have a different accent is not helpful for communities, or for the work we are trying to do.

"We feel incentives for reporting 'illegal immigrants' encourages racism and would be very divisive and unhelpful for local community relations.

"He seems to be grouping together all immigrants with people who are seeking asylum.

"The people who are trying desperately to come here are people seeking international protection – they are not 'illegal immigrants'.

"People seeking asylum in the UK are not allowed to work, so cannot take 'British jobs'."

Ms Oliver claimed deterrents were already in place for landlords and lorry drivers.

She said: "Landlords are already obliged to undertake 'right to rent' checks and are liable to fines of up to £3,000 if they fail to do so in respect of people living in their properties.

"Lorry drivers are liable to fines of £2,000 per clandestine entrant if they fail to take sufficient steps to secure their vehicles."

Medway councillor for Luton and Wayfield, and Labour's shortlisted candidate for the PCC role, Tristan Osborne, joined in the criticism of the scheme, branding it as "xenophobic".

The former special constable said: "I have read Mr Wilson's manifesto, and I'm not taking him particularly seriously, his comments on immigration make him completely unsuitable for this position.

"The money he is insinuating as a reward is open to abuse, what is to stop people being turned in who are already going through the asylum seeking process, or people being monitored by police?

"It is xenophobic, not racist, proposing the rewards for these people coming from countries outside of Europe.

"All of Europe is feeling the effects of migration, but it isn't for someone in Kent to take charge. We have to work together.

"Potential candidates are taking political ideals and bringing them into the election campaign.

"The police and crime commissioner role is about scrutinising the police's decision making and dealing with problems of our residents, such as antisocial behaviour, knife crime and burglaries."

Mr Wilson admitted the system could receive bogus complaints, but had a solution.

He said: "We've got to have a clear system, I'm sure critics have asked 'how can anyone tell the difference between a legal immigrant, who is allowed to work here, and an illegal immigrant'?

"It is difficult; it's comparable to comparing travel-accredited with non-accredited cattle.

"There will be people who've got a grievance against other folk and may just try and report people.

"But we will set up a computer system so it will be quick and easy to identify if 'John Smith' from Syria is entitled to be in this country or not.

"Once we sort those people out quickly, it will be easier to identify the potential illegal immigrants."

"The vast majority of these people are here legally and are welcome to work and live here."

Last week, Ukip's PCC candidate, Henry Bolton criticised the scale of the rewards.

He said: "I have seen the manifestos of potential candidates, and whilst there are comments that may seem appealing for some individuals, I think they require a great deal more thought.

"Claims such as paying a reward require a great deal of thinking through of the potential implications; £20,000, that's nearly the salary of a police constable."

Mr Wilson claims the money for rewards would come from government.

He said: "To get the money back from rewards we would ask the government for a refund once we have issued the reward.

"I would like to think that there aren't any lorry drivers bringing in any people into the country illegally, so we wouldn't have to pay out the money too often.

"But we know from news on the television that this is happening, and we need to do something to stop it."

Despite criticism, Mr Wilson is sticking by his plans to run for the county's police and crime commissioner in this May's election.

Perhaps a bigger question he faces, and as we reported last week, is whether he will actually be allowed to stand as a candidate.

He has been convicted in the past of assault for which he was fined.

However, because it carried a potential six month jail term, it may rule him out.

He insists he will be able to stand. Deadline for candidates is April 7.

WHO'S WHO IN THE PCC ELECTION

THE police and crime commissioner role was first introduced in 2012, and is there to hold the police's chief constable to account.

PCC's are also tasked with holding the police fund and deciding whether to raise the local council tax precept for policing.

The inaugural elections in November 2012 saw less than 16 per cent of voters in the county turn out for the election.

But with this year's election falling on the same day as local council elections, voter turnout is expected to be somewhat higher.

Current PCC Ann Barnes stood as an independent candidate in the election, and has so far not confirmed her intentions for the upcoming election on May 5.

The candidates so far in the mix – but not yet confirmed – include: Matthew Scott (Conservatives); Henry Bolton (Ukip); Steve Uncles (English Democrats); Fergus Wilson (Independent); and Tristan Osborne (Labour).

Following an election PCC's are expected to outline their police and crime plan, detailing what resources are being provided to the county's chief constable, as well as aims and objectives for the police.

This year's election will be held on May 5 - coinciding with the local elections.

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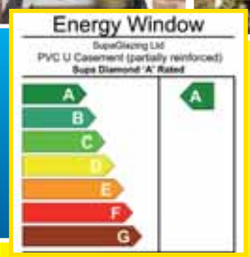

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Lawyer writes to 'killer' Stone over Bellfield

The Russell murders of 1996 stunned the nation but now doubt is again cast on convicted man

By Chris Murphy
editorial@kosmedia.co.uk

THE lawyer who represented convicted double-hammer killer Michael Stone says he has this week written to his former client in jail asking him if he wants to represent him again amid mounting speculation Levi Bellfield may have been involved in the brutal killings.

Serial killer Bellfield is currently in jail serving life terms for the murder of three girls and the attempted murder of another.

One was Milly Dowler. Having never admitted his guilt in her trial, he recently admitted his responsibility for her killing and, according to one source "sang like a canary" about his involvement in other crimes.

Nine police forces around the country have been notified about information he apparently revealed.

And there is growing speculation one of those could be the 1996 Russell murders in Chillenden, near Canterbury.

In a crime which stunned the nation, a family were attacked as they walked home across picturesque fields.

Lin Russell, 45, and her two children, Josie, 9, and Megan, 6, along with the family dog, were all savagely attacked along a country lane.

Mrs Russell had been picking up the children from their nearby school in Goodnestone and were making the short walk home across fields to their home in Chillenden.

They would never get home.

As they walked along a country lane a car drove past. A little further on, the car had stopped, blocking their route.

A man emerged demanding money. With no cash on her, Lin Russell told Josie to run for help. She was struck with a hammer. Mrs Russell and daughter Megan were then taken to a copse, tied up, and brutally attacked with the same weapon.

Miraculously, Josie was later found alive and rushed to hospital where she went on to make a full recovery.

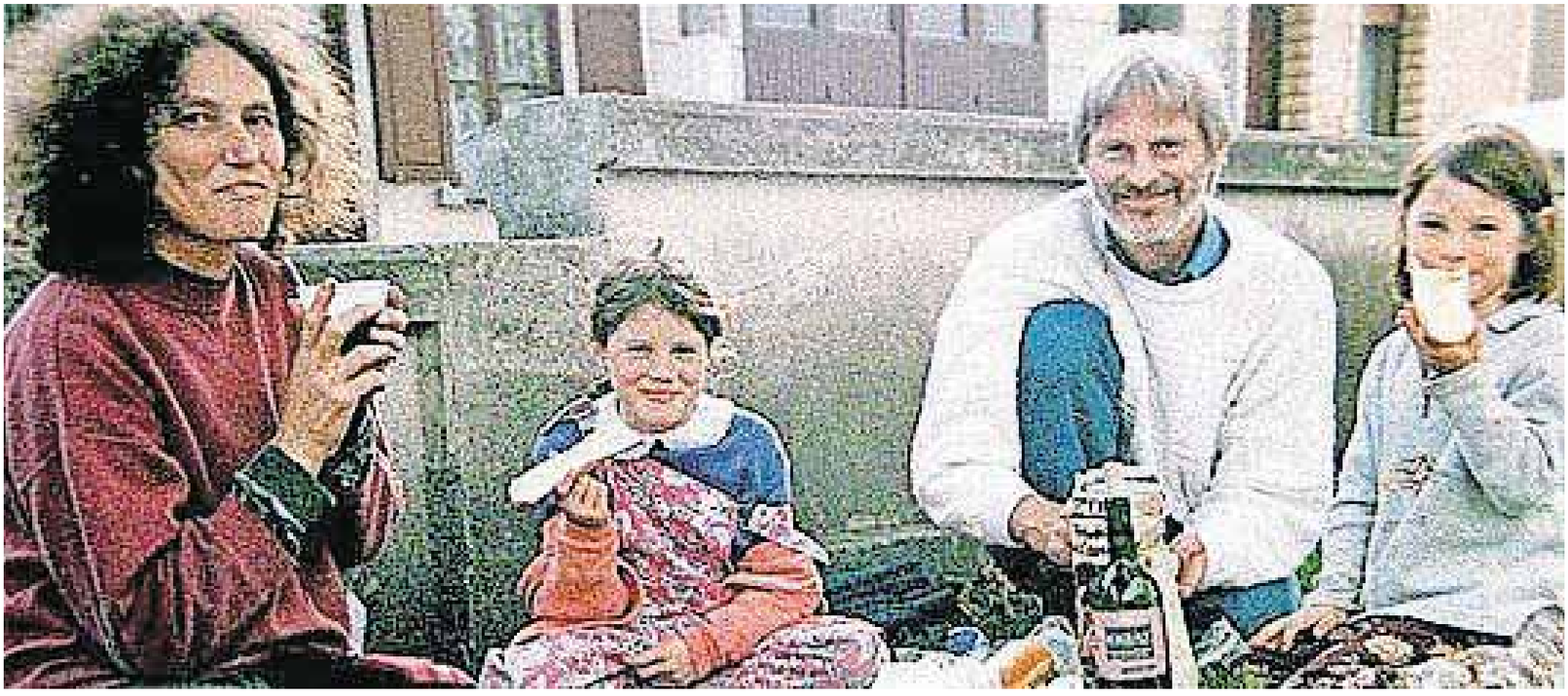
The crime made the front pages of almost every newspaper and young Josie's recovery was followed at every twist and turn.

And the hunt for the killer captured the public's imagination. Pressure began to mount on police to secure a conviction for such a high profile and apparently motiveless attack.

A year later, Michael Stone, from Gillingham, was arrested and charged.

He was convicted but has

KILLER: Has Levi Bellfield spoken about Kent murders?



DOUBTS: Lin, Josie, Shaun and Megan Russell. Lin and Megan died in Chillenden in 1996, with Michael Stone convicted of their murders but could the killer have actually been Levi Bellfield?

always maintained his innocence. There was no forensic proof linking him to the scene and the key evidence was an apparent confession while he was held in a cell and reported by a fellow inmate.

Campaigners for Stone have long pointed to Bellfield's possible involvement – saying he resembled the photo-fit issued at the time, used a hammer in his attacks, and was driving a car at the time similar to that spotted in the area.

Speaking to us on Monday morning, his former lawyer, Paul Bacon, said he has now written to Stone in his prison cell asking what he wanted to do legally in light of the latest Bellfield twist.

He told us: "I don't represent him at the moment but after this Bellfield stuff I have had loads and loads of people call me.

"So I have actually just dropped him a line saying 'Do you want me to do anything to respond to all these calls?'.

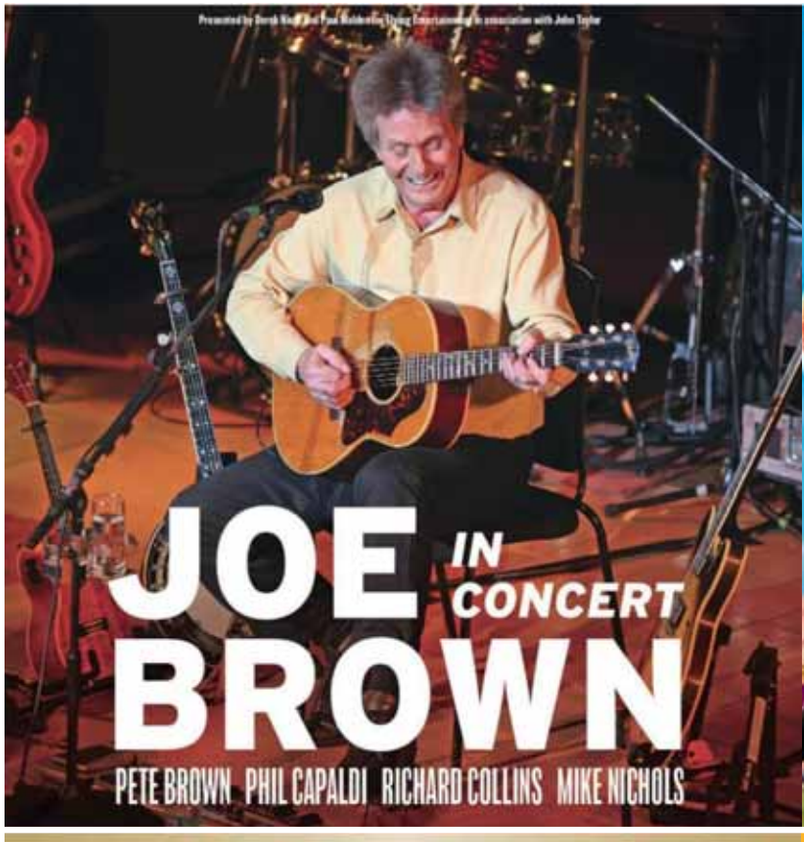
"Now I am waiting for him to come back to me and let me know."

Asked if he had heard if Bellfield has been talking to police about the Russell case, Mr Bacon said: "I don't know, but that's the thing I want to be ready for in case he has made that confession. The police are keeping things very close to their chest. We know he has confessed to Millie Dowler, but I don't know what else, even if there are other things.

"It is a matter for Michael, and if he says 'I'd rather you say nothing and keep your head down', then that's what I will do. It will take a few days before I get a response."

The Metropolitan Police confirmed Bellfield was still being spoken with, but would not say about which cases.

Continued on Page 16



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Continued from page 15

DETECTIVE: EVIDENCE WAS 'RATHER DUBIOUS'

A FORMER senior detective who worked on the case says he believes there is room for doubt over Michael Stone's conviction.

Nick Biddiss told us there was little or no forensics and no admission, other than a troubling apparent cell confession to another inmate.

On holiday in Spain, Mr Biddiss told us: "[Michael Stone] is a bad man but is he a murderer?"

He added: "The evidence was presented to the court and the criminal justice system whirred away and found him guilty.

"It was never ever one that I thought was totally convincing."

He went on: "I did look after the case when [Det Chief Insp] Dave Stephens was on leave. I was not involved when Stone was arrested, and the quality of evidence was always such that it was going to be down to the jury because he never admitted anything to the police at all. They didn't have any forensics, no admission other than a so-called cell admission which I have always felt was rather dubious at best. I just don't know."

Speaking two years ago, Dr Shaun Russell, the university lecturer who lost his wife and daughter in the attacks, said he has a lingering doubt.

He said: "If he [Stone} finally admitted it we'd be able to come down from not knowing finally and be sure.

"I watch TV programmes about criminals all the time trying to get to the psychology and understand what makes people do what they do because I've not had it from this guy and in this case.

"The whole thing was circumstantial evidence and it means we've been left hanging and unable to draw a line under it, or to move on totally, and forget about that aspect of it and think, 'At least we know – we're sure now'."

Adds former detective Nick Biddiss: "I probably share the same sentiments as Shaun does. Clearly the police would probably have to be looking at him [Bellfield] seeing if there are any other crimes including the one we are talking about."

The Metropolitan Police confirmed Bellfield was still being spoken with, but would not say about which cases. Nine police forces have been alerted to information so far. It is not yet known if Kent is one of those.

A key piece of evidence was a one-metre long boot lace dropped at the scene of the crime. It had a number of male DNA samples on it - none of which could be linked to Stone.

The lace has subsequently disappeared.

In addition, there was a swimming towel which had been used by the killer. The towel belonged to one of the girls attacked who had attended a swimming gala in Canterbury during the day.

DNA of a male was found on both ends of the strips but none belonging to Stone.

Who that belongs to may prove vital.

Other key anomalies include the only witness to the attack - the injured Josie Russell - describing the attacker as similar in height to her father, Shaun Russell.

Dr Russell was over 6ft tall. Stone is 5'7". Bellfield is 6'1".

Josie described the car driven by the attacker as being beige. It is believed, at the time, Bellfield drove a beige car.

And finally, the photo-fit issued at the time does bear a similarity to Bellfield.

Whether he was involved remains, currently, complete speculation. But it does once again make one of Kent's most notorious crimes the centre of intense discussion.

JAILED: Michael Stone during his trial

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT MICHAEL STONE...

WHILE doubts continue to exist over his conviction – despite a retrial – there is little doubt that Michael Stone is a man better off behind bars.

The big question is whether he is a man capable of such an horrific senseless double murder and should be serving a jail term for that crime.

A heroin addict who had a string of violent offences to his name over the years, a key complaint of the case against him has been the forensic evidence.

For a man who admits he was taking so many drugs at the time of the murder he couldn't remember where he was, it seems unlikely he could commit such a savage crime and not make a single slip-up which would lead detectives back to him.

He certainly had form, however.

Born in Tunbridge Wells in 1960, he had a disturbed childhood and found himself put into a children's home in east Kent, where he was abused physically and sexually.

A police record from the age of 12 for shoplifting and burglary, he was jailed on three occasions for grievous bodily harm, assault and robbery during the 1980s.

One incident saw him use a hammer during a robbery, another saw him stab a friend while he slept. After moving to Gillingham, he developed a heroin habit.

He was arrested in 1997 - a year after the murder - and pleaded not guilty. He was convicted in 1998 and given a life sentence.

The damning piece of evidence was a cell confession made to another in-mate. Much has been made of the credibility of this.

He secured a retrial in 2001 but was found guilty once again and told he must serve at least 25 years behind bars – meaning he would not be freed until he was 63.

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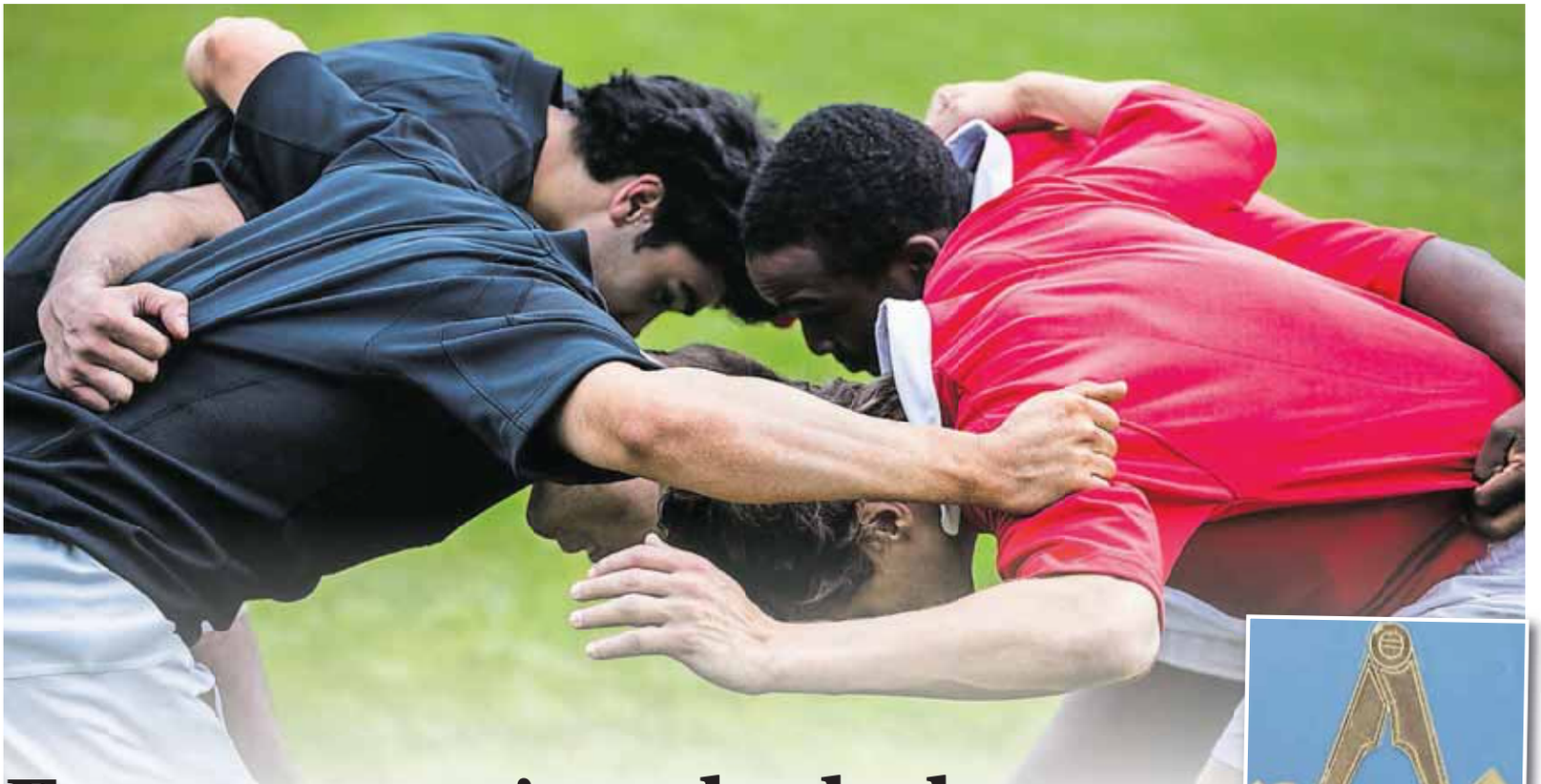


GRAPPLE: The Spirit of Rugby lodge will be officially founded at a special ceremony at Margate's Winter Gardens at the end of this month

Freemasons' rugby lodge to kick secret image into touch?

Among the hundreds of Masonic lodges across the county, a new one in the east of the county is scrumming down with a distinctive sporting theme this month

By Chris Murphy
editorial@kosmedia.co.uk

RUGBY clubs are well known for their close-knit camaraderie built on a foundation of team-work on the pitch. And now that approach is being embraced by that most mysterious of organisations – the Freemasons.

The Spirit of Rugby lodge will be founded (or 'consecrated' to use Freemason terminology) at the end of the month in Margate and says it will draw on the strengths of the sport to help boost the Freemason movement.

Kent spokesman for the Freemasons, Mark Stock, explained: "Rugby has a set of values like team work, supporting the individual, sacrificing everything for the team and helping others.

"Those are in line with the precepts of Masonry. So it is not surprising that a quite a lot of people who become Freemasons are ex-rugby players, rugby fans and fanatics.

"A modern move with Masons is to form special-interest lodges. There have been a number of them that have appeared around the country in the past two years, particularly with sports and other interests. So the people have that bond as well as the Mason's bond.

"So, the idea with this new lodge, is they will keep the core traditions in terms of the ceremonial aspects but the ball we have after meetings will be a little more fun and more rugby orientated. I don't think we will be getting drunk, or anything like that, it's just a way of moving Freemasonry forward and changing with the times to suit modern working men."

> **"I don't think we will be getting drunk or anything like that. It's just a way of moving Freemasonry forward and changing with the times to suit modern working men"**
>
> **Mark Stock,**
> Spokesman for Kent Freemasons

Apparently William Webb-Ellis, who created the sport, was a Freemason.

Certainly its popularity shows little sign of slowing.

There are some 185 lodges in east Kent alone, boasting up to 7,000 members. The west of the county has 179 and 5,000 members – that's 12,000 Freemasons in the county alone.

But while, publicly, the Freemason appear keen to kick rumours of secrecy and initiations into touch, there is little denying that it is that very mystique around it which continues to lure people to it.

And the question remains of what is the main purpose of the lodges? Sold on a diet of camaraderie and community enrichment, it remains a popular draw for those wanting to feel part of a wider organisation.

A Monty Python fan, Mr Stock refers to the architects sketch where John Cleese is on his knees literally begging to be allowed to join the Masons.

Mr Stock said: "You do get people who are very keen to join and not all of them get through the selection process.

"You have to be accepted, but you don't necessarily need to know someone as you did in the past.

"Our biggest source of new members is people approaching us because they have heard about what we do. We do go through a fairly rigorous process.

"We say that Freemasonry is for just, upright free men, of mature age, strict judgement and sound morals. So you can't just walk up and join, we would want to get to know someone for a few months and meet them socially so we were happy that they actually were joining for the right reasons.

"One of the main misconceptions of is that it will give them a leg up in business. It is actually not the case."

On the application form, there is even a box all new members must sign to ensure they realise this.

He added: "People do meet people and make business contacts just as they would at their rugby club or golf club or at the pub. That does happen but it is not the purpose of joining to get a lot of extra business for your company."

Another perpetual rumour with the Masons is that anyone who gets in to trouble with the courts will be let off by making a secret sign to the judge.

Mr Stock said: "We don't tolerate that. There have been criminals who have been Freemasons but these days they don't remain members. Using a nod to the judge was never the normal practice – there was never a situation like that, of course not.

"It is not the normal practice, it is not something you are told. There is nothing in the ritual that says if you find yourself in court say this to the judge or give this sign and you will get off. That just does not exist."

So why do there rumours persist alongside a mistrust of the secrecy, the unusual initiations and some of the unusual language used by Masons?

Mr Stock said: "I don't think we use strange language. We use words that we know and it is a bit archaic, that is part of the tradition.

"The reason Masons keep their initiation ceremonies a secret is a bit like the end of a book or movie.

"You learn life lessons, and it is a philosophy. So if it was all laid out in front of you on a piece of paper on the day you went in to a lodge, there is no value to it. So we keep parts of the process secretive so the individual going through can learn as the story unfolds, and it will be a benefit to him. We want to protect that."

He added: "Having said that, our general demeanour in public has been, I would say through our own fault, a little too secretive over the past 60 years.

"Up until the 1930s and the Second World War, the Masons would openly parade. But Hitler considered us to be like the Jews, homosexuals and gypsies and many Masons ended up in concentration camps, which drove the movement underground. He mistrusted us and we came under threat – we were on his hit list and thought we were subversive.

"In the last 10 years, Freemasons have been working hard to open those doors and it has been a little bit tricky, I have to say because of the preconceptions, and we are a little bit guilty of compounding that.

"What my mission is to open the door but there is a little bit we want to keep secret. But what we do and what we are about, we want to be open about."

The Spirt of Rugby Lodge will hold its founding ceremony on February 29 at Margate's Winter Gardens.

‘Tories guilty of prisons decline’

They say there’s never any votes to win with prison reform, but the prime minister this week unveiled a long overdue overhaul of the service. But some say the government is to blame for the state it is in...

By Chris Murphy
editorial@kosmedia.co.uk

A PRISON warder has hit out at the prime minister’s prison reform plans saying it has been his government that has overseen the “greatest decline in the prison system in the last 30 years”.

In an unexpected move this week, David Cameron revealed he intends to roll out a programme of significant reform to the prison service, which would see more focus on rehabilitation, governors of a number of prisons given greater control over the way theyare run, and a league table system introduced.

The PM said: “My starting point is this; we need prisons. Some people – including, of course, rapists, murderers, child abusers, gang leaders – belonginthem.Forme,punishment–that deprivation of liberty – is not a dirty word.

“I never want us to forget that it is the victims of crime who should always be our principal priority. And I am not unrealistic or starry-eyed about what prisons can achieve.

“Not everyone shows remorse and not everyone seeks redemption.

“But I also strongly believe that we must offer chances to change; that for those trying hard to turn themselves around, we should offer hope; that in a compassionate country, we should help those who’ve made mistakes to find their way back onto the right path.”

He added prisoners should be viewed as “potential assets to be harnessed” but “the failure of our system today is scandalous”.

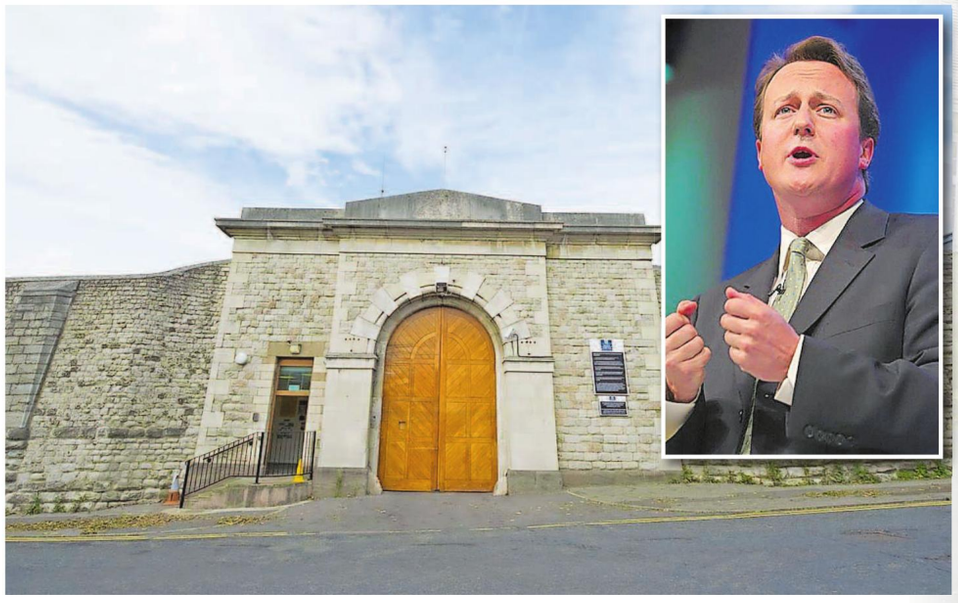
But Mike Rolfe, who works at HMP Elmley on Shppey and is also the Prison Officers’ Association (POA) representative for Kent, says it’s a little rich coming from the Conservative government.

He told KoS: “Increasing violence, drug use and systematic failure to achieve has all accelerated at great pace since 2010 and the responsibility for the current crisis in prisons rests squarely at the feet of the prime minister and his secretaries of state for justice.”

Kent has seen its fair share of problems in its jails with riots in Maidstone and Sheppey in recent years and increasing amounts of violence.

Adds Mr Rolfe: “The POA has long campaigned for the debate on prisons to feature at the fore and for us to be included in that debate, however the voice of the experts working on the frontline have yet again been ignored when the value and experience they bring could be extracted in great detail in order to achieve success.

“The debate on prisons is welcome but long overdue. The system has been a political football for a long period of time and has faced continual change, leaving scarce resources in disarray. The prime minister proclaimed to have all the answers to the failing prison estate, however it has been his government that has over-



PRISON: David Cameron, inset, wants reform at jails like Maidstone, above. Right, Blantyre House - see page 22.

seen the greatest decline in the prison system in the last 30 years."

Mr Cameron acknowledged that "current levels of prison violence, drug-taking and self-harm should shame us all", with a typical week seeing 600 incidents of self-harm, at least one suicide and 350 assaults including 90 on staff across the nation's prison system.

He added the cycle of reoffending costs up to £13bn a year and leads to more victims of crime.

"It matters to you: because in the end, who are the victims of this re-offending? It's the mother who gets burgled or the young boy who gets mugged. It matters to the prison staff – some of the most deeply committed public servants in our country – who have to work in dangerous and intimidating conditions.

"And yes, it matters to the prisoners themselves, who mustn't feel like society has totally given up on them.

"I'm clear: we need wholesale reform. And I am convinced that with the right agenda, we can be world leaders in change just like we have been in welfare, just like in education we can demonstrate that with the right reforms, we can make a lasting difference to people in our society."

Damian Green, MP for Ashford, was minister for police and criminal justice until July 2014, and shadow secretary of state for education and skills in 2001, can look at the position from both sides of the new reforms.

He told us: "I am very much in favour of this package of reforms. When we say we will tackle our deepest social problems and extend life chances, we want there to be no no-go areas. That includes the 121 prisons in our country, where our social problems are most acute and people's life chances are most absent.

"Some people need to be locked up, but that does not mean we should assume that for everyone in prison it is a case of once a criminal always a criminal. If we give prisoners a chance to turn their lives round we will make life better for everyone."

But the POA's Mike Rolfe said: "The move to autonomous prisons will be monitored with great caution as the prison system is built upon mutual aid between establishments and having a collaborative approach. Greater accountability may mean that prison

Continued on page 16

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CONDITIONS: Kent has seen its fair share of problems in its jails

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO BLANTYRE HOUSE?

A LITTLE over a year ago, the inmates of Blantyre House prison (pictured on page 21) in Goudhurst were transferred to other jails and the gates closed for what, at the time was supposed to be a six month refurbishment.

Despite lots of reassurances from the Ministry of Justice that it would be open again after six months of work, nigh on 13 months later it remains shut and no sign of it opening again imminently.

The 120-capacity open jail housed category C and D inmates – those reaching the end of their sentences and being prepared for release.

At the time, the Prison Officers' Association blamed an inability to recruit staff. The Ministry of Justice insisted in would be open again "later in 2015".

This week, the Prison Service would only say: "Further details will be released in due course."

Yet when overcrowding is such an issue, many will be asking just how the estate is being managed.

In a report by the Prison Reform Trust, published in November, it said: "The prison population in England and Wales has soared by over 40,000 since 1993, and currently stands at 85,163. England and Wales has the highest imprisonment rate in Western Europe at 148 per 100,000 of the population. This compares to an imprisonment rate of 100 per 100,000 in France and 78 per 100,000 in Germany. At an average annual cost per place of £36,237, the rise in the prison population since 1993 represents an estimated additional cost of £1.22bn annually."

It predicts that will reach 86,700 by June this year.

HMP Canterbury closed in 2013 having been a centre for foreign prisoners in the last few years of its life. And in 2014 the site was purchased by its neighbours - Canterbury Christ Church University.

HMP Maidstone, which at over 200 years old is one of the nation's oldest jails, now handles foreign prisoners - with many deported at the end of their sentences.

Which leaves Kent's other two main prisons – the so-called Sheppey cluster of HMP Elmley and HMP Standford Hill.

Continued from page 15

governors will be quick to avoid issues that may affect performance and damage reputations creating a system that will seek to discard trouble makers and those that don't wish to fit the criteria set by minister for justice Michael Gove and his advisors to learn and contribute to society, of which there are many.

"This will shift focus from achieving results to a competition to which prisoners they house. The individual must want to learn in the first instance to achieve grand scale change and that will be the greatest challenge of the latest proposals.

"Less for more seems to be the government's motto and with no increase in government spending on prisons to increase the much needed frontline staff, the reforms and push towards education will be impossible to achieve. Prison discipline coupled with provision of rehabilitative strategies must go hand in hand and strike a balance.

"Without control, order, rules and security tackling issues of drug use, violence, bullying and gang culture a healthy learning environment cannot flourish. The government have yet again missed a trick to invest and professionalise frontline prison staff to deliver both safe, decent and secure learning environments in which rehabilitation can be a success for everyone involved."

In his speech, Mr Cameron said he is set to accept recommendations made in Dame Sally Coates' upcoming review of prison education, which includes the end to regional contracts, and promises to protect the £130 million prison education budget.

Liberal Democrat former education minister David Laws will chair a new social enterprise and work with Dame Sally and organisations such as Teach First to develop a new scheme that will encourage graduates to work with offenders.

He also declared penal reform should be the "great progressive cause in British politics".

Frances Crook, chief executive of the Howard League for Penal Reform, said: "This is a welcome speech from the prime minister, which opens up a space for radical and rational thinking. He is right to say that we do need prisons, and right to say that we don't need prisons as they are today.

"Prisons are currently violent and overcrowded. As such, they fail everyone: victims, the public, staff and prisoners themselves.

"Prison reform, however, is the tip of the iceberg. Improved education and increased autonomy for governors will not work if there are people crammed into filthy institutions with no staff to open the cell doors. We need action now to tackle sentence inflation and the profligate use of prison. Then the prime minister's vision can become a reality."

PURE WEDDINGS

High Street dresses
Shopping on a budget

Pet proposals
Get your pet involved

Bridesmaid gifts
Way of saying thanks

High Street bridal selections to suit

THE average wedding now costs a whopping £20,000, according to Time Out magazine. That's a £6,000 rise over the last 10 years – and, furthermore, a survey by Brides magazine revealed the average spend on a wedding dress alone is £1,340.

But what if your budget doesn't stretch to those great heights, or you simply don't want to spend a fortune on a dress you'll wear once?

Thankfully, the high street's bridalwear selections are better than ever, offering serious style and value for money.

If you're looking for something fairly traditional – that is, a dress that's pale and falls past the knee – but don't want to uphold the tradition of breaking the bank in the process, these are your best bridal bets...

BRIDAL BUDGET: UNDER £400

Popular with celebs Stateside, occasion-wear designer Adrianna Papell also has a glamorous bridalwear range that's stocked at John Lewis.

Even the most detailed gowns, embellished with diamante or crafted from oodles of ivory chiffon, don't go higher than the £400 mark with some well under that, making Papell your go-to if you're looking for a dramatic dress at a cool price.

Likewise, frock specialist Damsel In A Dress this season carries a trio of floor-length bridal gowns that will hold their own against even the most striking backdrop.

To see the dresses on offer visit www.johnlewis.com.

BRIDAL BUDGET: UNDER £300

Ghost has a selection of 11 satin dresses in beautiful, vintage-inspired shapes that can be dyed to order in four weeks, with prices ranging from £195 (for slightly shorter styles) to £275 (for long-sleeved and floor-skimming styles).

Of the dye options, the Ivory, Oyster and Silver Lake shades fit on the traditional wedding colour wheel, and there's a style to suit every body shape.

For something a little more relaxed, the Brigitte Bardot collection at La Redoute has a couple of dresses that boho brides will love.

The strapless bustier dress, with its gorgeous gathered front and long, dipped-hem train is enough to make anyone want to elope to the Caribbean for a barefoot beach wedding.

Visit www.ghost.co.uk or www.laredoute.co.uk for more details.

BRIDAL BUDGET: UNDER £200

They don't actually come with the bridal prefix, but Coast's host of long, white dresses are more than altar-appropriate.

From the

your budget

full-skirted floral Lucianna to the lace-topped Lori Lee, these dresses are unfailingly feminine, but they'll still leave you with change from £200.

Similarly, ASOS is packed with wedding-worthy gowns from brands like Jarlo, Fame and Partner and Forever Unique, as well as the site's own bridal line.

With a younger customer in mind, some are a little on the skimpy side, but if you filter your search results by style (maxi dress) and colour (white or cream), you'll find lots of wearable options.

For more information visit www.coast-stores.com or www.asos.com.

BRIDAL BUDGET: UNDER £100

Even supermarkets have got in on the 'I do' action, with Tesco stocking an £80 wedding gown.

Floor-skimming and lace-covered with sweet cap sleeves, it's a bridal bargain that's not to be sniffed at.

BHS offers more choice with more than a dozen wedding dresses, and shorter styles will set you back around £95.

But the best bang for you buck can be found online at sites like www.little-mistress.com, where nude and cream maxi dresses with floral applique details are soft and pretty (without being prissy), and all fall well below the £100 mark.

Visit www.clothingattesco.com, www.bhs.co.uk or www.little-mistress.com.

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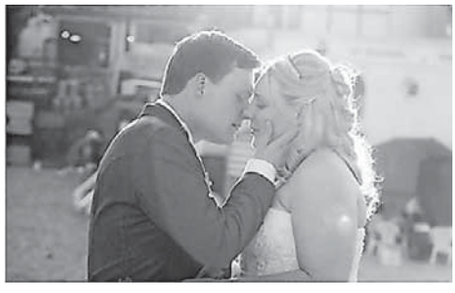

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Getting pets involved in proposals

THERE are many different ways to get your pet involved in your wedding, but how about getting them involved in your proposal too?

For many people, their furry friend is a well-loved and treasured part of their life.

If you have a pet together, getting them to have a starring role in your proposal could be a nice touch.

There are a number of quirky ways to do this.

If your cat or dog wears a collar, why not attach the engagement ring to it and bring them in to your partner?

There are also a number of small, lightweight hanging signs or chalkboards which can be purchased in shops.

One of these could be placed around your pet's neck with a message on them.

Some people opt for the 'will you marry my dad' message, but you could personalise it to anything you like.

If this would make your pet uncomfortable, you could always write the message on a piece of decorated card or paper and place it on the floor near where they are standing, so that your partner sees it. You could perhaps place the ring next to your pet and written message, arranged so that your partner sees them all upon walking into the room?

However, if it will be a struggle getting your pet to stay still for this long then you could take a photo of your pet next to the sign and show it to your partner later.

If you don't have a pet, but still love animals and want them to be featured in your proposal, then it could be worth contacting nearby zoos or aquariums to see if the staff there will be able to help you plan a surprise.

Some aquariums will have the option of visitors creating a sign featuring a personalised message, which one of their divers will then hold up to the glass as you and your partner look at the sealife.

Perhaps a zoo near where you live would be able to do something similar?

There are a number of different options, and a proposal featuring an adorable animal is one not to forget.

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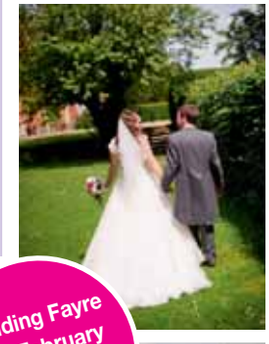

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Saturdays - £5,500.00 - available on: 2 July, 13, 20, August (usually £6,580.00). 12 November (usually £5,810.00). 4, 11, 18, 25 February. 4, 11, 25 March (usually £5,810.00). Additional day guests charged at £66pp, additional evening guests charged at £17.50pp.

Sundays - £3,450.00 - available on: 5 June. 3, 10, 24, July. 21 August. 4, September (usually £4,150.00). 9, 30 October. 13, 20, 27 November (usually £3,600.00). 5, 12, 19, 26 February. 5, 12, 19, 26 March (usually £3,600.00). Additional day guests charged at £58pp, additional evening guests charged at £17.50pp.

All dates subject to availability at time of enquiry

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Some causes of

FOR many people, planning a wedding can be a very stressful task.

Weddings can require a great deal of organisation - with the venue, food, outfits, photographer and music being just some of the elements that need careful consideration and planning.

As well as making sure that you and your future spouse have the day you are hoping for, work goes into meeting the needs of family members and friends too.

Research carried out by Bridebook - a new free digital wedding planner - found that the average bride spent 970 hours planning their wedding last year.

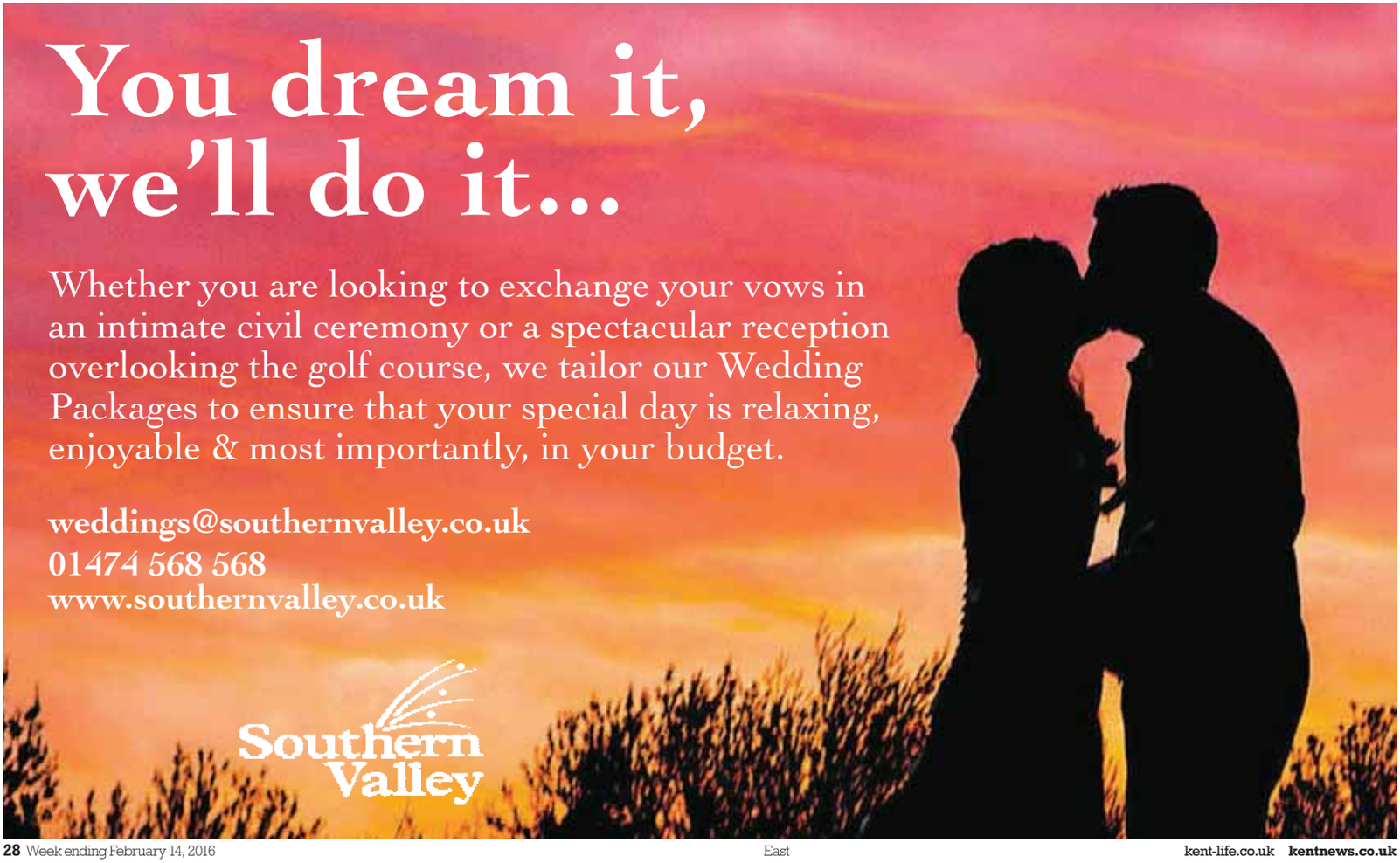
What's more, they found that people spent 300 of these hours planning during the working day.

Bridebook carried out a survey of 5,000 brides from across the UK.

So what did they find most stressful about planning their big day?

Spreadsheets were actually a big cause of stress, with 65 per cent of brides saying that they 'hated' them. Some 64 per cent said that they were worried about going over their budget - and one-in-five of them did.

The struggle to wade through different advice accounted for 61 per cent of stress, and 56 per cent of brides



wedding stress revealed in research

said they had had arguments over their guest list.

While 53 per cent said family interference was a cause of frustration – with one third of couples even trying to ban their parents from being involved in the planning – 21 per cent felt let down by a supplier and 18 per cent felt overcharged by a supplier.

Finally, 15 per cent of brides said they felt like they were under pressure to 'get it right' from other people.

The research found that with budgeting and spreadsheets so high up on the list, five per cent of brides decided to enlist a wedding planner to ease their stress levels.

Bridebook found that the average bride was spending 970 hours planning her wedding, using more than seven weeks worth of their work time to do this.

A spokesperson for Bridebook said: "Brides admitted using office stationery, contacting suppliers over email, drawing up seating plans, searching online for inspiration and creating excel budgets as some of the ways they spent their working hours. Ten per cent even admitted using the office postage system to send some of their invitations."

Bridebook aims to help couples plan their wedding using any device – checking in whenever they like and using the tool to help plan the day.

It lists 139,000 wedding suppliers on the site, allowing people to filter results until they find what they are looking for, with the wedding 'dashboard' giving updates.

Bridebook's founder and groom-to-be Hamish Shephard said: "We believe everyone deserves a wedding planner. Whatever your budget, Bridebook is completely personalised for you, and completely free. We are transforming the whole wedding planning process into an incredible journey of inspiration, discovery and creativity, with Bridebook doing all the legwork."

■ **For more information you can visit www.bridebook.co.uk.**

BRIDEBOOK'S Wedding Survey reveals popular days to pop the question
VALENTINE'S Day: *77%*
CHRISTMAS Day: *70 %*
DURING a holiday: *61%*
NEW Year's Eve: *54%*

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Some thoughtful bridesmaids' gifts

YOUR bridesmaids have been by your side in the lead-up to the big day, helping you to prepare for the hen do and many other parts of the wedding.

So, when the day arrives, many people decide that they would like to give their bridesmaids a gift to say thank you for all their help.

There are countless gifts to choose from, and what you give your bridesmaids will differ depending on their individual personalities.

Here are just some ideas of what you could give them as a token of your appreciation for their role in the wedding:

BRIDESMAIDS: There are a number of gifts you can buy to show your appreciation

Jewellery

A necklace, bracelet or pair of earrings may be the right gift to give to each of your bridesmaids.

There are so many to choose from, whether you go to a shop near you or have a look online to find the perfect present.

You could either buy all of your bridesmaids the same present – for example a matching bracelet – or you could personalise the gift.

There would be many ways to do this – you could get them a necklace with their initial on it, or get them each a similar necklace but with slight variations.

If any of your bridesmaids are literary lovers, Scribbelicious (www.scribbleicious.com) may be a good place to look. They sell a selection of jewellery which has book quotes inside.

You could get your bridesmaid a necklace or bracelet with a quote from a book they particularly like inside, or one that you think suits their personality.

There is so much to choose from, and you can always enlist the help of their friends and families to make sure you choose a great gift.

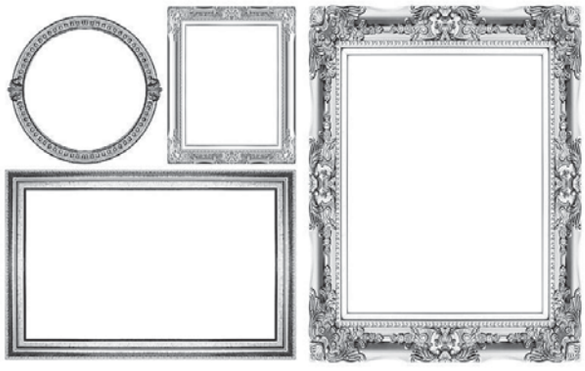
Mugs

How about giving your bridesmaids a personalised mug, which they can use when they are winding down after the big day?

A number of places offer printed mugs for reasonable prices, with a selection online.

You could buy a personalised photo mug for each of your bridesmaids, perhaps featuring a picture of a good memory that the two of you share.

Alternatively you could get a



VARIETY: Photo frames, jewellery or food could make good gifts

personalised message printed on to the mug, or search for ones featuring the word 'bridesmaid' so that they can be reminded of the role they played in the wedding - there is a selection of these on www.notonthe-highstreet.com.

Photo frames

Your wedding photographer is likely to take a number of photographs of you with your bridesmaids on your special day, so why not get them each a photo frame that they can use to keep them in?

Once you have the photographs back, you could find out your bridesmaids' favourite snaps and then make them some copies.

There are a number of photo frames to choose from either online or in shops. You could either buy one ready-made, or find somewhere that will make personalised ones - so that you can include their names, or a nice message for them to read.

If you feel like taking part in some arts and crafts, you could always buy a plain frame, before personalising it yourself at home.

Food or drink

If any of your bridemaids have a sweet tooth and you enjoy baking, you could always make them something special to eat on the day such as a cupcake, macaroon or cookie.

This would give you a good chance to personalise the gift, and you could use icing or decorations to create a message.

Alternatively you could find some jars and fill them with your bridesmaids' favourite sweets, adding a personalised label or gift tag on to it.

If you have bridesmaids you think would prefer an alcoholic gift, why not get them a bottle of wine with a personalised label on it?

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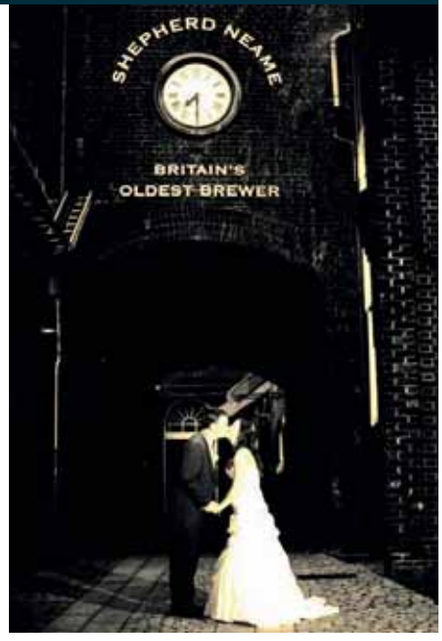

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WHILE many associate engagements with traditional diamond rings, a lot of people opt for a ring with a colourful stone in it instead.

And with so many different options, there is no need to feel that you have to stick to diamonds.

There are a number of colourful stones to choose from if you think this is what your partner would prefer, such as emeralds, sapphires, tanzanites and rubies.

If your partner has a favourite colour, a ring with a stone that shade could be a touching gesture.

Visit your local jewellery store to discuss what colourful stones they have on offer.

A number of famous faces wear colourful engagement rings, with different reasons for their choice.

Duchess of Cambridge Kate Middleton's engagement ring comprises an 18-carat oval sapphire, which is surrounded by 14 diamonds and set in white gold.

Prince William said that he chose to propose to her with the ring because it had belonged to his mother Princess Diana and both were 'very special' to him.

Country singer Jessica Simpson's husband – Eric Johnson – proposed to her with a 5-carat ruby ring.

She was born in July, making ruby her birthstone and giving the ring extra meaning.

There is nothing wrong with choosing something non-traditional if you think it's something your partner will love, or if it has particular sentimental value to them.

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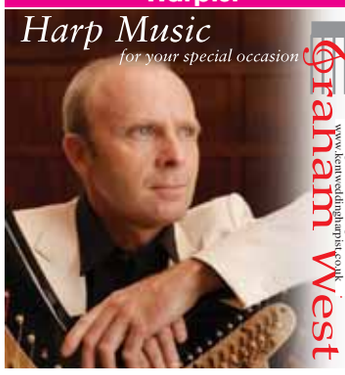

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Gurkhas set for Nato role in Kabul

By Luke May
luke.may@archant.co.uk

A GURKHA regiment based in Folkestone has been training in Norfolk ahead of an eight-month tour of Afghanistan later this year.

Whilst on tour in Kabul, the 2nd Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles will be protecting Nato military and civilian advisers working in government ministries.

The light infantrymen have been training with Foxhound patrol vehicles ahead of the operation, as part of the UK's support to the Afghan government.

Around 400 Gurkhas will begin their deployment to Kabul from their Shorncliffe barracks in April.

Captain Bikulman Rai, second-in-command of B Company, said: "Our role in Kabul will be to provide force protection to the NATO advisers helping the development of the Afghan Army and Government. We will be protecting the mentors when they go out to support training or attend meetings.

"We have been working with the Foxhound for several months and our soldiers have shown the flexibility to adapt to a different way of operating quite easily. The training has been very thorough and we feel like we are pretty much ready to go."

TRAINING: The 2nd Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles will be protecting Nato military and civilian advisers working in government ministries while on their eight-month tour in Kabul

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Don't break our hearts by Valentine price hikes

Business leader warns firms not to take advantage of our loving feeling this weekend by increasing prices to cash-in on our desire to spoil our loved ones. But will they listen to the sage advice?

POPULAR: Leeds Castle is one of the attractions expecting bumper crowds this weekend

By Chris Murphy
editorial@kosmedia.co.uk

ONE of the county's top business leaders has warned firms not to inflate prices and over-commercialise their Valentine's Day offerings this weekend - or run the risk of driving customers away for good.

The big day of romance falls this Sunday and traditionally sees couples head out for a romantic day or night.

And that means everyone from restaurants to tourist attractions are lining up to win their trade.

But Jo James, chief executive of the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce says businesses need to be wary not to spoil the mood of love.

She told KoS: "Businesses should not make Valentine's Day over-commercialised by inflating prices as will only drive away customers.

"It's a time when businesses should be looking at additionality to enhance the customer experience, and of course, that can come at a price, but a price that is comparable to the service. Customers are acutely aware of rip off costs, particularly on occasions like Valentine's Day.

"A happy customer is likely to tell others and grow your business, an unhappy customer will certainly tell others and with websites like TripAdvisor so easily accessible, you could find yourself in real problems.

"So for Kent's businesses to make the most of this one day, they need to provide extra value in every aspect."

According to the British Retail Consortium we will splash out to the tune of £1.3billion to show our loved ones we care - with men shelling out £622m and women £354m.

The Kent business leader said: "Valentine's Day is not just about making women feel special, we live in a world of equality, we need to also be making the men of our county feel special and valued, and achieving that will be the successful, entrepreneurial customer-facing businesses in our county.

"It is a day a business needs to ensure goes right which will not only maximise their profit, but also tempt their customers back again, and not just for Valentine's Day.

"A business like a hotel or restaurant or even a florist putting on a Valentine's Day special but then does nothing extra other than inflate the price, will soon find itself on the wrong end of some stinging criticism."

Tourism champions for the county, Visit Kent, said it was certainly an important time of year.

A spokesman explained: "Valentine's Day is a great opportunity for businesses to target a specific market – couples – and to test new products.

"We have some incredible romantic locations in the county who really know how to ramp up their offer in February, and we have a lot of savvy tourism business making sure they make the most out of the Valentine's Day buzz with themed-offers and special events for those planning a romantic treat, or for those in need of a last minute idea.

"While Kent's tourist attractions may not see as big a rise in visits as they do during half term or at bank holiday weekends, there is definitely a spike of interest in leisure breaks and activities around February 14 – particularly for hotels and spas."

Among the attractions looking to cash-in this weekend will be Margate's Dreamland.

After a difficult few months where it was revealed it was facing debts of £3m, it is throwing open its gates for the first time since its festive Frosted Fairground, in the hope of providing an entertaining alternative to the usual Valentine's day-out.

A spokesman told us: "We are throwing a Kiss Me Quick party, our first public event of the year.

"Valentine's is still a grey area; couples like to keep plans quite casual and resent being asked to pay double the usual price for a meal or flowers - as can be the case nationwide.

"So our free party ticks all the boxes for the last minute planners, it's fun, flirtatious and appeals to singletons too.

"Our retro Sunday teas have sold out one sitting with just a few remaining tickets left for the second one. Margate is feeling the love."

Maidstone's Leeds Castle is also expecting a brisk trade.

A spokesman explained: "We are expecting to welcome an extra 1,000 visitors on Valentine's Day this year.

"There is nowhere more romantic to spend the day with your loved one than 'the loveliest castle in the world'.

"Our day visitor figures are always weather dependant but we will be extremely busy with guests."

And if you want something a little different - well you can always head to the Port Lympne Wildlife Park near Hythe and help celebrated giraffe Valentino's birthday.

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Compass has shifted for young backpackers

How big business has moved in on the 'rite of passage' with package tours and upmarket accommodation. Tom Pyman finds out more...

ONCE upon a time, young students fresh out of university or pondering their options after emerging from school, would head to what became dubbed 'the hippy trail' - a backpacking adventure across south east Asia.

But today, according to a leading academic, the route has been battered down by big businesses – travel firms wanting to take advantage of young people's desire to leave daily life behind and explore the big wide world.

And a combination of low cost airlines, natural disasters, regional competition, tightening visa rules and terrorism have all changed backpacking, perhaps for good.

Now that hippy trail has been replaced by a trend of mainstream conventional tourism.

And according to Dr Mark Hampton, reader in tourism management at the University of Kent's business school, that has changed the whole backpack experience.

He has written a paper, Change, Choice, and Commercialisation: Backpacker Routes in Southeast Asia for the international journal Growth and Change.

Co-written with Professor Amran Hamzah of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, it reveals an increasing process of convergence between backpackers and modern tourism.

He told KoS: "I was inspired by doing a lot of research on the region over a number of years, particularly focusing on Malaysian and Indonesian tourism and the fact I actually went backpacking myself as a teenager.

"I was 19 and went to India for two months and had an incredible experience meeting local people and embracing the culture, and the effect it had on those people was a real point of interest."

According to Dr Hampton, established backpacker centres on the trails such as Penang in Malaysia have become too mainstream – travellers have been there, done it, got the t-shirt and instead want to unlock new opportunities elsewhere.

Indeed the concept is viewed by many now as something of a cliche.

Once upon a time that area of the world was somewhat mythical, with tales of destinations like Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar recounted by fellow backpackers by word of mouth.

Now, though, an image is being manufactured by travel firms and official tourism planning and marketing groups, who offer 'flashpackers' the opportunity to stay in upmarket accommodation.

As a result, rural enclaves are becoming interspersed with 'holiday within holiday' beach destinations, where attractions such as scuba diving are on offer.

Dr Hampton adds: "It's all very well staying in a nice, fancy hotel but traditionally backpackers would tend to stay in a family-run bed and breakfast, for example, where they can drink the local beer, eat the food and really get to know the people."

The economic impact of such travelling is huge to developing nations in the region, which rely on this influx of wide-eyed youngsters for growth.

"The spend in these developing countries is astonishing," he said.

"It's the number two industry in the region behind agriculture or manufacturing, so attracting these backpackers is so important.

"But for every pound that is spent, 70p leaves the country because tourists are using hotels and services owned by foreign business, spending on imported food and drink, meaning only 30p stays locally.

"With traditional backpacking, it's flipped, and 70p remains in the country.

"This trend is somewhat worrying, as having such large firms controlling backpacker transport, accommodation and tours could reduce pro-poor tourism, which aims to alleviate poverty among marginalised communities.

"Policies of encouraging small-scale tourist enterprise could concentrate tourism in fewer destinations, and raise the possibility of anti-competitive behaviour."

And it's not just apparent in south east Asia, with commercialisation rearing its head in other tourism hotspots like Africa and south America.

However, Dr Hampton, who originates from Jersey but now lives in Faversham, says that one positive is the tendency backpackers have to remain in the region, even in times of real hardship.

In recent years, south east Asia has been hit by a number of natural disasters – such as the tsunami of 2004 which claimed the lives of close to 250,000 people.

He said: "Although tourists can get nervous about terrorism or natural disasters and may change their travel plans, backpackers are unlike other tourist types.

"If there is a crisis in a country or a natural disaster, typically backpackers are the often the last to leave a place and when things settle down, often the first tourists to return.

"This is good news for small local businesses in developing countries that depend on backpackers."

David Stitt is director of the Tunbridge Wells-based specialist travel agency Gap360, which offers 'gap year' type holiday packages.

While he admits the 'magic' that came with travelling in the 1970s may have subsided, trips, albeit commercialised and institutionalised ones, are still incredibly popular.

"Our view is that things are definitely changing," he said.

"You can't stick your thumb out on the side of the road and start travelling like you could in the old days because it's not safe.

"A lot of young people that use us are being funded by their parents, who obviously don't want to see their child in any danger, and so that's why they use us.

"You wouldn't have seen a hippy with money from their parents so the world is changing.

"There's definitely less magic, no doubt, but those using us can still experience the food, the people and the culture and everything that people go out to south east Asia to achieve.

"If you want that raw kind of experience you can still get it, it's just a little harder to find these days."

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MUSCIAL: Sam Bailey (far right) is looking forward to making her musical theatre debut in Chicago

Singer Sam Bailey will play Mama Morton in Chicago

Molly Kersey-Law spoke to the performer about her musical theatre debut....

SINGER Sam Bailey will be making her musical theatre debut in Chicago.

The show will be making its way to Dartford during its national tour.

Ms Bailey, who won the 10th series of talent show The X Factor in 2013, is looking forward to taking to the stage.

"I am playing Mama Morton, who is a prison warden," she said.

"She is the woman that is in charge of all the girls at the prison.

"She collects a few favours and she helps the girls get on in prison, looking after them. She's an interesting character to play. It's taken a while to get into the character but I'm enjoying every second of it. It's nowhere near what prison's like now."

Ms Bailey worked as a prison officer before her X Factor win.

"It's a great PR stunt to have a prison officer playing the part of Mama Morton, but I got the part by auditioning like everyone else."

She said she was a little intimidated when she met the cast.

"Everyone was so good and they have all done it 1,000 times before, and then there's little old me.

"This is big for me, it's my musical theatre debut and what better way to do it than to sing in a show like this?"

She will be starring alongside Hayley Tamaddon and John Partridge.

Ms Tamaddon, who will be taking on the role of Roxie Hart, is well-known for her roles in Coronation Street and Emmerdale.

Mr Partridge - who will be playing lawyer Billy Flynn - is best-known for playing the role of Christian Clarke in EastEnders.

He has been taking part in the latest series of reality TV show Celebrity Big Brother - and will have just a few days to rehearse before the musical begins its tour.

"Hayley is just the perfect Roxie," said Ms Bailey.

"John Partridge hasn't been with us since day one. He will have learnt his script in the house so he'll know his lines.

"He'll be great, he's a pro."

Speaking about the show, Ms Bailey said: "It's a very, very clever show. The choreography is very unique."

So would she like to do more musical theatre in the future?

"It's always been something that I have wanted to do, so I have definitely ticked something off my bucket list," she said.

"I don't want to do it all the time, because it has been hard being away from my family for six months. I don't want to put all my eggs in one basket, I want to do lots of different things.

"I am just enjoying the ride and working hard for my family."

She knows the Dartford area well, and previously attended North West Kent College.

She has seen a number of shows at the Orchard Theatre.

"I saw Chas and Dave there in the nineties with my dad," she said.

"Dartford holds a place in my heart so it'll be nice to go back."

Chicago will be at the Orchard Theatre from February 29 to March 5, with performances at 2.30pm and 7.30pm.

Tickets range from £20 to £42.

For more information or to book tickets to the show you can visit www.orchardtheatre.co.uk or call the ticket office on 01322 220000.

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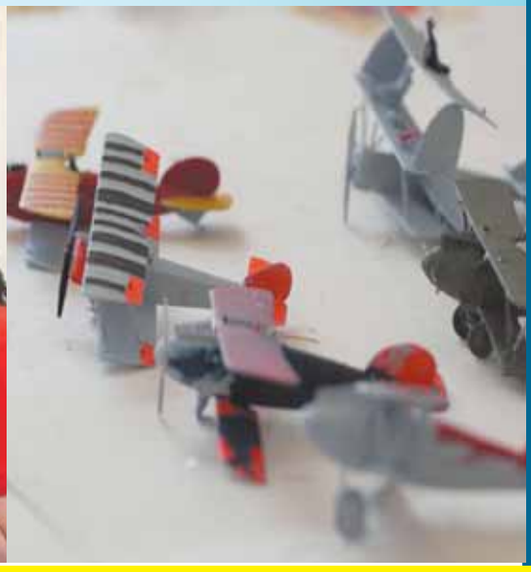

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Artistic response to an act of homophobic hatred performed

By Molly Kersey-Law
molly.kersey-law@archant.co.uk

AN artist's response to a homophobic attack will be performed in Margate later this month.

Nando Messias created a new performance after he was subjected to 'an act of homophobic hatred' on a London street in 2005.

He has created The Sissy's Progress with the aim of confronting violence and "standing up for sissies everywhere'.

It will be performed on stage at the Tom Thumb Theatre on February 20, as part of its UK tour.

Produced by Dance Art Foundation, the show is a walking performance which features elements of dance theatre.

It will be leading the audience into the street, where a live marching band will play original music composed by Jordan Hunt.

Mr Hunt and five other musicians will be taking part and the instruments featured will include the cornet, saxophone, trombone, tuba and snare drum.

Mr Messias uses performance art, dance and theatre in his work and explores themes such as gender, visibility and violence.

ARTIST: The performance will lead audiences into the street

Speaking about The Sissy's Progress, he explained: "It's genuinely frightening.

"I almost always get abuse from passersby when we're doing the performance.

"The audience gets to experience that and that makes it feel uniquely relevant.

"I'm particularly proud that we take this performance precisely to places where such work wouldn't normally be seen.

"It's a universal theme."

Mr Messias is originally from Brazil and is classically trained as a dancer - he has been practicing ballet since 1997.

He moved to London to study at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, completing his studies there in 2011.

He has performed at a number of venues around the world, presenting his recent show Walking Failure at the Just Like a Woman event at the Abron Arts Centre in New York.

The Sissy's Progress will be starting at 7.30pm.

Tickets are £10.

For more information, or to book, you can visit www.tomthumbtheatre.co.uk.

Tale of eccentric toy maker

BALLET Coppelia will be performed at the Margate Winter Gardens on April 7.

It tells the story of an eccentric toy maker and his beloved doll.

To book, call 01843 292795.

Folkestone band to return

FOLKESTONE band Native People will be returning to their home town to play a gig at the Leas Cliff Hall.

They have been touring since 2013.

They will perform on March 5 at 7.30pm.

To book, visit www.wegottickets.com/event/349313.

Mime artist on the move

MIME artist Trygve Wakenshaw will perform his show Kraken at the Marlowe Studio, Canterbury, on March 15.

Tickets are £18.

To book, visit www.marlowetheatre.com.

A hit musical in Dartford

MUSICAL Priscilla Queen of the Desert will be performed at the Orchard Theatre, Dartford.

Based on the movie, the show follows the adventures of three friends who climb aboard a battered old bus to find love.

It will run from April 25 to 30.

To book, visit www.orchardtheatre.co.uk.

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Hannah Sanders on stage

FOLK singer Hannah Sanders will perform at St Edith's Hall, Sevenoaks, on March 4.

The performance will be starting at 6.30pm.

Tickets are £10 and can be purchased on the door.

Into The Hood: Remixed

ZOONATION Dance Company will be bringing their production, Into The Hood: Remixed, to the Orchard Theatre, Dartford.

It will run from March 8 to 9.

For more details, or to book, visit www.orchardtheatre.co.uk or call the ticket office on 01322 220000.

10cc perform their hits

BAND 10cc will perform hits from their album Sheet Music at the Margate Winter Gardens on October 1.

The show starts at 7.30pm.

To book, visit www.margatewintergardens.co.uk.

Life of Kenneth Williams

DAVID Benson's new show - Think No Evil Of Us: My Life With Kenneth Williams - will be performed at the Theatre Royal Margate.

The one-man show aims to unlock the character of Carry On star Kenneth Williams.

It will take place on July 15 at 7.30pm.

Call 01843 292795 to book.

Adventurer tells story of his Africa solo cycle

By Molly Kersey-Law
molly.kersey-law@archant.co.uk

AUTHOR, broadcaster and ultra-endurance cyclist Mark Beaumont will be bringing his new show to Tunbridge Wells.

He will be performing his lecture-style show Africa Solo at the Assembly Hall Theatre next month.

During the show he will be telling the story of his solo cycle through Africa, which saw him make his way from Cairo to Cape Town in under 42 days, cycling an average of 160 miles each day and setting a new world record time.

He beat the previous record by 17 days and the gruelling challenge took him through six countries - Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Botswana.

As well as detailing his travels, which took him through deserts and across mountains, he will also be talking about the people who helped make the journey possible - his team in the UK and the people of Africa.

Mr Beaumont has carried out a number of other solo adventures in the past - becoming known as 'the man who cycled the world' in 2008 after completing an 18,000 mile circumnavigation cycle.

He then carried out a 13,000 mile cycle of the American Cordillera - the longest mountain range on the planet - as well as summiting the continent's two highest peaks for the BBC documentary The Man Who Cycled The Americas.

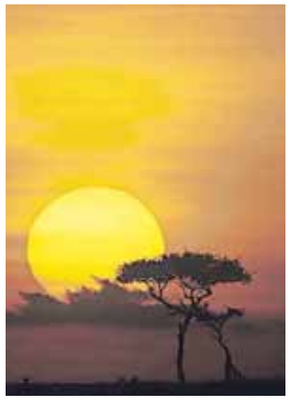
Over the last 10 years Mr Beaumont has travelled through and presented documentaries from more than 100 countries.

Africa Solo will be performed on March 22 at 7.30pm.

It is presented by Speakers From The Edge, who organise events showcasing motivational speakers from the world of adventure, exploration and ultra-endurance.

Tickets are £14.50. For more information, or to book, visit www.assmeblyhalltheatre.co.uk or call the box office on 01892 530613.

ENDURANCE: Mark Beaumont will discuss his adventures



ADVENTURE: The adventurer cycled through Africa

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An 'exciting time' for blogger Ella Woodward

Health blogger Ella Woodward has now released a follow-up book to her successful debut cookbook

AFTER a whirlwind year, which saw her first book become the UK's biggest-selling debut cookbook of all time, health blogger Ella Woodward could be forgiven for having a bit of time off.

But this 24-year-old isn't one for thumb-twiddling. Her follow-up book - Deliciously Ella Every Day - has just hit the shelves (and a third is already in the pipeline), plus there's a new venture - The Mae Deli in London, which she runs with her fiance - and cookery classes to teach, a new modelling campaign for Amanda Wakeley, and her ongoing training to become a nutritionist.

"It's good," she says with a laugh. "There's a lot going on, but it feels like a really exciting time."

Another of those exciting things is her forthcoming marriage, to Tessa Jowell's son Matthew Mills.

They got together last year, and enjoy a happy working relationship as well as romantic one.

"There's something nice about when you start something together, when you share in the excitement."

She says they're planning to have a 'really small wedding' later this year.

Like her deli, books - and presumably her wedding cake too - Ms Woodward has built her reputation on the idea that, with a few clever ingredient swaps, healthy eating needn't mean fussy and boring eating.

It's been a steep learning curve for the former 'sugar monster'. Indeed, just five years ago, Ms Woodward radically changed her diet when her health was on the wane, leaving the then 19-year-old model and history of art student bed-ridden for up to 16 hours a day, unable to risk a short stroll without suffering heavy heart palpitations and chronic pain.

SUCCESS: Health blogger Ella Woodward

Eventually diagnosed with postural tachycardia syndrome (PoTS), a potentially debilitating condition which affects the autonomic nervous system, she found that traditional treatments only went so far, and so she looked to her diet for answers.

She admits she'd rarely cooked before that point, but gradually, she overhauled her diet, cutting out meat, dairy, sugar and processed food. She felt much better, and began documenting her culinary experiments on her blog. Today, her subscribers are in excess of 60,000, in addition to her 715k Instagram followers and 85k Twitter fans. And much as the regime works well for her and her devotees, she is keen to avoid guilt-mongering others into following her food path.

"I don't particularly like the concept of a guilty pleasure. Be forgiving of yourself. I think people want to 'eat perfectly', and that doesn't exist. Eating perfectly is what makes you happiest, and that might be eating a smoothie for breakfast but having a pizza with your girlfriends for dinner - that's fine. As long as you don't wake up the next day and make yourself feel guilty about it. There's so much guilt associated with food."

Tom Stade in Margate

COMEDIAN Tom Stade will be bringing his new stand-up show to Tunbridge Wells.

Mr Stade has previously appeared on TV shows including Live at the Apollo and Michael McIntyre's Comedy Roadshow.

He will be performing his new show, You're Welcome, at the Trinity Theatre on March 4.

To book, call 01892 678 678.

Evans is In The Money

HOST of BBC Radio 4's Goes To Market Simon Evans will be performing in Folkestone in April.

Mr Evans, who has previously starred in BBC 1's Live At The Apollo, will bring his new stand-up show In The Money to the Folkestone Quarterhouse.

The performance will take place on April 22 at 8pm.

Visit www.quarterhouse.co.uk to book.

Dance show on stage

DANCE show Elevate will be performed in Maidstone

The show will be performed by Directions Performing Arts dance academy.

It will be running at the Hazlitt Theatre from February 18 to 20.

Performances will ,be taking place at 2.30pm and 7.30pm and tickets are £13.

For more details, or to book, visit www.parkwoodtheatres.co.uk.

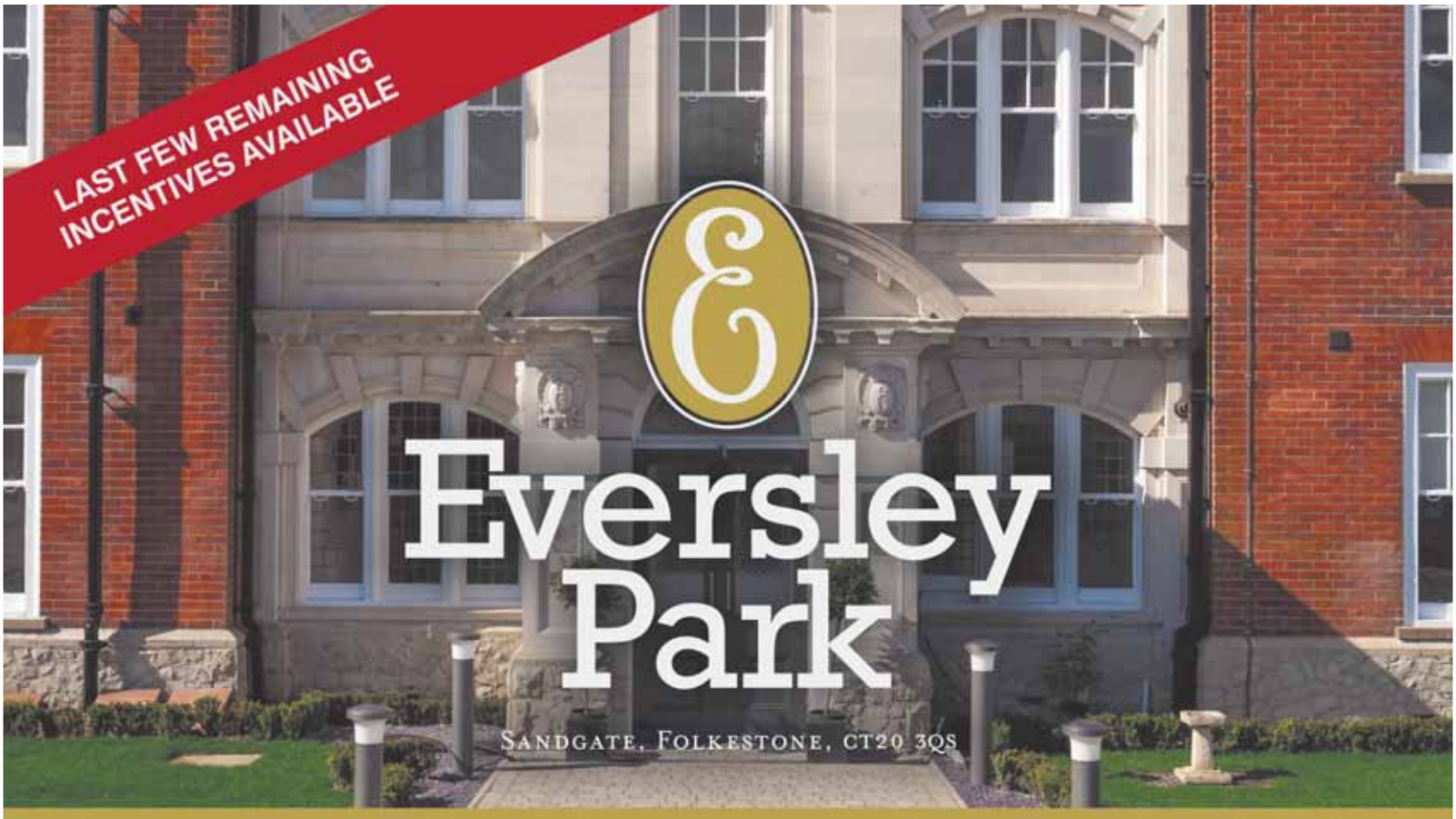
Sean Lock at Marlowe

STAR of Channel 4's 8 Out Of 10 Cats Sean Lock will be performing in Canterbury.

Mr Lock will be bringing his new comedy show, Keep It Light, to the Marlowe Theatre on May 2 and 3.

The show will be starting at 7.30pm and tickets are £23.

For further information, or to book, visit www.marlowetheatre.com.



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4-star Rembrandt Rhine in Flames & Moselle River Cruise

Escorted Holiday by Rail or Air

22 September, 2016 • Quote RR9

Join us for a scenic, fun-packed cruise onboard the 4-star mps Rembrandt Van Rijn taking in Cologne, Koblenz, Cochem, Zell, Rudesheim and Boppard, where you'll see the Rhine in Flames festival. Originally held to celebrate the grape harvest, this spectacular pyrotechnics show also features an illuminated flotilla of riverboats. Also enjoy the Boppard Wine Festival featuring wines from local vineyards, live music and entertainment.

INCLUDED: Escorted return rail travel from London St Pancras or Ebbsfleet to Brussels and coach to Cologne or return flights with luggage from a choice of UK airports to Cologne - supp't may apply • 7 nights full board cruise sharing a twin outside main deck rear cabin – upgrades available • Beer, wine and soft drinks with lunch and dinner and from 6pm to midnight at the bar • Captains Dinner • Entertainment • Transfers abroad • Services of our Cruise Director on board

4-star Brahms Rhine in Flames & Moselle River Cruise

Escorted Holiday by Rail or Air

31 August, 2016 - Quote RN8

This fabulous cruise takes in the Rhine and Moselle Rivers, Bingen's wine festival and fireworks display, captivating scenery, picturesque towns and more. If all of this is not enough, add the 4-star MPS Johannes Brahms, providing just 80 guests with a friendly crew, great food, superb service, entertainment and spacious en-suite cabins - all with picture windows. With visits to Cologne, Andernach, Rudesheim, Bingen, Cochem and Boppard, this is a magical voyage that will stay in your memory for years to come.

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Rhine Christmas River Cruise

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22 December, 2016 • Quote: RX12

Experience the Christmas splendours and stunning scenery along the Rhine on this festive river cruise. Germany is famed for its Christmas celebrations and markets and this holiday includes visits to some of the famous towns along the Rhine with festive markets. Every year, thousands of lights, countless traditional traders and a rich selection of specialities attract visitors from all around the world. Ports of call include Cologne, Koblenz, Rüdesheim, Mainz, Mannheim and Boppard.

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Marching into Yorkshire for break

TRAVEL REVIEW: Yorkshire

by Stephen White

THE glamorous face of Catherine Zeta Jones may be splashed all over billboards to promote the new Dad's Army feature film, but it's very likely another star will steal the show when the nostalgic TV adaptation hits the big screen.

A small fishing town in East Riding, Yorkshire, famous for its tasty fish and chips, is set to become a staycation hotspot this summer. Much of the filming for Dad's Army was done in Bridlington, a popular resort for 19th century leisure seekers, which is preparing for a return to glory.

Ahead of the crowds, I visit for a weekend break.

Some of the scenes from Dad's Army, including shots of the bank, tea room, police station, Hodges greengrocers, Jones' butchers and the military parade, were filmed in Bridlington's Old Town.

With some buildings dating from the 17th century, the Old Town stands about a mile northwest from the harbour, originally known as Burlington Quay. It was built close to the beautiful Priory, founded in 1113 and once the biggest and wealthiest church in Yorkshire.

With its High Street, Market Place, Corn Exchange House and (in 1710) 25 pubs, the Old Town was a major trading place for surrounding villages. Just seven pubs survive today.

When the Dad's Army film crew descended in November 2014, they transported many of the shops and buildings back to the 1940s. Much of that decoration remains, allowing visitors to step into a film set: the Black Lion still appears as Walmington-on-Sea's Royal Oak Inn while various shops feature 1940s fashions and a variety of air raid warden posters. Posters also tell of wartime austerity: horsemeat being fit for human consumption, general food shortages and rationing.

MOVIE : Many scenes from Dad's Army were filmed in Bridlington

There are no such worries of hardship at Field House Farm Holiday Cottages, our "billet" for two nights, and where some of the film's scenes were also shot. Situated a mile up the coast in the tiny, old village of Sewerby, this cluster of six luxurious cottages makes a perfect base for anyone exploring the Bridlington and Flamborough Head area.

Field House Farm is owned by John and Angela Foster and their grown up children James and Lucy. It has been in the Foster family for generations, and was originally part of the nearby Sewerby Hall's estate.

Until August 2003, the farm was home to a herd of some 130 Friesian/Holstein dairy cattle, but the slump in milk prices forced their sale. Only a few "decorative" cows are kept on the land these days.

It's still a working farm, but the focus has switched to growing wheat, barley, oil-seed rape, field beans and alternative crops. Tourism and wildlife conservation are also new areas of business.

The cottages offer a range of accommodation for two to six people and are all converted farm buildings with evocative names like The Byre, The Old Dairy and The Turnip House.

They are perfect for all-year visits. When we drive there in mid-January, it's bitterly cold. We come across plenty of snow on the local hills and our car is covered in ice for much of our second day.

Our cottage, The Roost proves to be a beautifully warm and comfortable retreat, however, with all the cottages having oil-fired central heating and log-burning stoves. In warmer months, a large play area, just off the farm's main courtyard will prove very popular with children.

The Roost, features attractive exposed brick and chalkstone walls. Its two large bedrooms are either side of a big, comfortable lounge and fully equipped kitchen. Both bedrooms have flat screen TVs and are dressed with comfortable and quality bedding, and each has a beautifully-fitted ensuite.

Free wi-fi is provided for anyone keen to keep in touch with the outside world.

Just as Poldark gave tourism a boost in Cornwall and Downton Abbey put Highclere Casle on the map, big screen exposure is likely to send visitors marching to Yorkshire in the following months.

TRAVEL FACTS

STEVE White was a guest of Premier Cottages, who offer a week's stay at The Roost, Field House Farm Cottages (sleeps four) from £500, or a three-night stay from £300.

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Film Review by Damon Smith

TRUMBO

(15, 124 mins) Drama/Romance

HOLLYWOOD is in the throes of a highly publicised civil war about ethnic diversity.

Filmmakers have vowed to boycott this month's Academy Awards in protest at the lack of black actors among nominees, prompting sweeping reforms to the voting membership.

In 1947, it wasn't race relations that pitted the great and the good of California against one another: it was the perceived threat of Communists, who could use the big screen to spread their pernicious propaganda.

Membership of the Communist party was not illegal, but various figures behind and in front of the camera were called before the House Un-American Activities Committee to testify about their political affiliations and to name and shame Communist sympathisers within the ranks.

A group of screenwriters, producers and directors were so incensed by this challenge to their First Amendment right to freedom of thought and speech, that they refused to give direct answers to the committee.

These so-called rebels became The Hollywood Ten and were blacklisted by the studios for more than a decade.

Among them was Dalton Trumbo, who secretly penned Oscar-winning scripts to Roman Holiday and The Brave One during his time in exile.

Jay Roach's handsome period drama, based on the biography by Bruce Cook, relives this inglorious period of paranoia and suspicion, when a few brave men stood up for their rights and suffered horribly.

Trumbo - played by Bryan Cranston - enjoys a charmed life with his wife Cleo and three children Niki, Chris and Mitzi, until waspish columnist Hedda Hopper - played by Helen Mirren - casts aspersions on his political leanings.

Actor John Wayne, elected president of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, weighs in on the argument and Trumbo is held in contempt by Congress.

While some people sever ties with Trumbo to protect their careers, low-budget filmmakers Frank and Hymie King happily employ the venerated writer to polish their B-movies.

Leading man Kirk Douglas also uses his influence to secure the writer a seat at the Spartacus table, despite protestations from advisors.

Distinguished by a tour-de-force Oscar-nominated performance from Bryan Cranston, Trumbo is a fascinating portrait of a time when suspicion could end a promising career. John McNamara's elegant script glisters with snappy one-liners - "He's trying to sell his soul, but can't find it" - that recall a golden era when substance complemented style.

By Hannah Stephenson
editorial@kosmedia.co.uk

FESTIVAL: A number of events will be taking place during the Capability Brown Festival

300 years of a great gardener

HE is said to be to landscaping what Turner is to painting, and Wordsworth to poetry. And the legacy of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown remains for us all to see in immense parkland and gardens, both at home and abroad.

Now, the public has a chance to see his work in all its glory during the Capability Brown Festival, being launched on February 25, which brings together a huge range of events, openings and exhibitions featuring historic landscapes, from horse and carriage rides to art exhibitions to cycling trails.

His designs changed the face of the 18th century British landscape, creating rolling parkland, flowing rivers and serpentine lakes.

He was considered by some to be a genius, and by others as a destructive force, as he swept away formal knot gardens and parterres to make way for his more natural landscapes.

His nickname of 'Capability' is thought to have come from his describing landscapes as having "great capabilities". During his 32-year career as a landscape gardener and 'place-maker', he shaped more than 170 estates including Chatsworth House, Derbyshire; Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire; Stowe, Bucks; Wrest Park, Bedfordshire and Ashburnham in Sussex.

Born in 1716, one of six children to a yeoman farmer in Northumberland, Mr Brown's daily walk to school from Kirkharle to Cambo across the Wallington estate may have inspired his naturalistic designs.

He began work as a gardener at the country house of Kirkharle before going to Stowe in Buckinghamshire, now a National Trust property, where he took responsibility for the architectural and landscaping works in the garden. In 1764, he was appointed King George III's Master Gardener at Hampton Court Palace.

His revolutionary ideas were taken up by other 18th century designers, and it wasn't too long before great Scottish houses and castles became surrounded by the parkland and naturalistic planting schemes that typify the period.

Mr Brown's style was derived from the two practical principles of comfort and elegance: that everything should work and that a landscape should provide for every need of the great house, as well as cohere and look elegant.

Ceryl Evans, Capability Brown Festival 2016 director, explains: "In the 18th century, Brown did not have access to motorised machinery and other technology, work had to be done by hand. Yet he transformed the country's landscape by using trees, meadows and water features on an extraordinary scale, bringing them together to create designs that became quintessentially English historic landscapes."

For details of events in the Capability Brown Festival 2016, go to www.capabilitybrown.org.

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Please include your name and address, although these will be withheld in exceptional circumstances, and a daytime phone number for verification (this will not be published). We reserve the right to edit all letters.

Fergus? Your run is arrested

THANKFULLY the law is clear and Fergus Wilson is definitely disqualified for the purposes of being a police and crime commissioner [KoS last week].

Sections 66(3)(c) and 66(4)(a) of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 20011 make it quite clear that the salient matter is the conviction for an imprisonable offence and the fact that 'assault by beating' carries a maximum term of six months imprisonment carries no advantageous consequence for him whatsoever.

John Greenhill, via email

Dartford has had its fill of pain

I AM in total agreement with Joan Owen about the congestion around Dartford (Letters, last week).

I live on the London Road not far from the bridge which crosses the M25. Weekdays from 7.30am till 9.30am the traffic is often bumper to bumper and if there is an incident on the M25 at any time of day traffic is at a stand still.

Where do they propose all the extra cars, which will be at the new village they are going to build opposite Bluewater, are going to go if they do not put the crossing at Gravesend? We who live at Stone will not be able to travel anywhere by car.

Please all you people in Gravesend give us a thought, we have had most of our fields built on so don't congest us anymore.

D Ripley, Stone

Even my family cannot visit me

I TOTALLY agree with Joan Owen's comments.

The people of Dartford and the surrounding area have become a town cut off from civilisation. We have cars but are unable to use them, not only does our town and the surrounding roundabouts become one huge car park, but selfish impatient drivers trying to get any which way out become a danger.

Nobody wants a tunnel or bridge near them with this kind of congestion but it has to go somewhere and I believe it's time to share the misery. I do not dare attempt to pop into town to do a shop as I fear that the two hours I have from finishing work to school pick up is not sufficient, if as usual there is a problem at the tunnel and I am unable to get back in time.

My family refuse to come and visit me all due to fear of being stuck with the tunnel traffic.

Theresa Attwood, Dartford

LETTER OF THE WEEK

We're failing to care for our care homes

I THANK you on your article about care homes but alas the government are not interested in the fate of the elderly, why should they be? They will have enough in their pension pots to pay for good care.

So many nursing homes were closed and now, of course, the elderly must reap what brainless idiots have sown.

On many occasions it was the décor of the place, the size of a room, that forced closure because the owners could not afford to carry out the changes required. People with dementia do not require posh décor they require TLC and cleanliness.

So many of our homes have foreign staff that speak very little English so are not understood by elderly patients. It is very important that you converse with the elderly when you are carrying out their activities of daily living.

The elderly need company many do not see a soul for days and those who have a carer their visits are so time based it gives the customer no incentive to survive. Many say they have had enough; that they want to go, as life is pointless.

Personally, I feel so many of our elderly are now getting dementia because of loneliness they start by talking to themselves.

They get very frightened about dying in their sleep and not being missed so their demons visit them at night. Keeping people in their homes lost and lonely is not the answer. I am convinced if the MPs in charge of this sad state of affairs had half a brain they would indeed be dangerous.

I really fear for what the next 10 years will bring these poor folk who are in for an unimaginable sad end of life for which we should hang our heads in shame. The media keep reporting on their plight but it gets ignored by the buffoons in government.

Cecilia Hammond via email

Tunnel decision will destroy us

I AM strongly against the lower Thames crossing proposal for the sake of our villages, green belt and marshes, This government needs to invest in public transport. The need isn't to build more and more roads. Kent used to be called the Garden of England; not any more.

Robert Standing, Gravesend

We have to leave EU to be ourself

GREAT letter from Terry Mullard [KoS last week]. There's so much wrong with the EU, it's impossible to cram into one letter!

For those of us still sane, the fact the prime minister has to get approval from 27 countries for his minor alterations, is just a forerunner of how it will continue to be if we remain in the EU.

We'd still be tied to the German run EU behemoth, still have lost the right to fish in our own waters, still lost the steel industry, still lost the industries competing with EU countries, still be unable to make our own laws, still not be in control of our own country, our own destiny, our own borders and even worse, still be losing the British way of life.

Either dilettante Dave is disconnected from reality, or he's following the same path as his great hero, Tony Blair. The man the Tories call, 'the great man', 'the master'. Speaks volumes doesn't it.

I know how I shall vote; for us to keep our Britain, not the career MPs' Britain.

Phil Granger, West Malling

Churchill would surely leave EU

MAY I propose Sir Winston Churchill as the leader of the Leave EU campaign.

This great Englishman gave us leadership in our darkest hours and presided over the loss of a generation to secure democracy.

Me thinks he would be turning in his grave to witness our present prime minister rushing to stay in an undemocratic organisation which can be viewed as a dictatorship, with bureaucrats taking precedence over elected representatives from member states.

Me thinks he would be puzzled at what our politicians, councillors and representatives are actually doing.

Only David Cameron appears to have purpose which can be interpreted as a long job interview – as he has committed to leaving his present position soon.

Edward La Coste, Lamberhurst

Strange world of our politics

DONALD Trump as president of the USA?

The UK has a prime minister whom appears to be a liberal with a seemingly Labour chancellor. The Labour opposition has a leader to all intents and purposes a communist.

So why not? We seem to live in extremely strange political times.

S Reeves, Herne Bay

KOS 10 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

AS part of our commitment to providing the best service to you, we have produced our 10 guiding principles

Kent on Sunday will:

1) Be available in every postcode in Kent.
2) Be fair, accurate and balanced.
3) Be written in clear, concise English.
4) Not be overly sensational.
5) Have a sense of humour.
6) Have an easily understood division between news, comment and advertising.
7) Seek to celebrate as well as constructively criticise.
8) Highlight topical issues of concern to people living in the county.
9) Spotlight individual cases which raise broader concerns.
10) Champion causes that it feels are important to the well-being of the county and its people.

We hope you enjoy Kent on Sunday.

images of kent

Bison, Port Lympne

by **Alison Griffiths, Lympne**

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driving

By Steve Loader
editorial@kosmedia.co.uk

NEW SPORTAGE: It's now bigger and better than ever before...

Sportage's impressive lack of surprises

FIRST DRIVE: Ambitious Kia has replaced its best seller with typical aplomb – so we knew it would even better all round...

JUST one surprise with the all-new Kia Sportage SUV – it looks even better in the metal.

Pre-launch photography had fuelled fear that the Korean marque's biggest seller had lost on-road presence, but our first drive showed how its successor looks far classier.

Then, no more surprises: Korean marques look for big leaps with each new model, so we just expected the latest Sportage (from £17,995) to ride better, handle better, and look and feel better inside.

Cabin and boot space has risen too, helped by a 30mm longer wheelbase. And my one gripe about the old car has been addressed: rear seat backs rarely fold fully flat for a proper load space, but the old Sportage's could have served as a ski jump.

The backs still don't fold quite flush, but this can't swamp the new model's many positives.

Again available with front-wheel or all-wheel drive (from £21,995) – the latter denoted by a KX model prefix – the engine line-up could suit all needs: 130bhp 1.6 petrol, 174bhp 1.6 petrol turbo, 114bhp 1.7 turbodiesel, and 2.0 turbodiesel in 134 or – my pick - 182bhp output.

The impressive petrol turbo is new, but the other four have been carried over.

The mainstay 1.7 diesel's fleet appeal helped it claim more than half the sales of the previous car, but though even cleaner and more efficient this time around, it can sound gruff and is maybe getting long in the tooth.

Behind the wheel, all versions tested felt well-sorted, with good feedback from the all-new steering, and sharp handling balanced by good ride quality.

Incidentally, Kia had a record 1,500 firm orders for the Sportage's first weekend on sale and the £31,495 2.0 diesel First Edition flagship was one of the most popular choices – a sure sign that Kia is moving upmarket.

» Read more of Steve's motoring reviews in...
KENT LIFE

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DS steps up with its standalone stance

Breaking from parent brand Citroën was never going to be easy but DS has made a good start via makeovers writes **Steve Loader...**

PREMIUM brand DS now stands alone, selling three facelift cars that formerly wore parent brand Citroën's famous chevrons, but exciting all-new models are promised.

While we await these, we tested the middleweight DS4 (from £19,495) perhaps the Cinderella of this nascent brand: not as striking as the big DS5 flagship and commanding nothing like the sales of the smaller MINI-rivalling DS3.

But its transformation to DS guise was more than a makeover: the car has emerged as not one, but two cars with the addition of a pumped-up Crossback variant (from £21,745) apparently aimed at retaining Citroën DS4 buyers who liked the old car's high-riding style and want even more of the same.

DS obliged by boosting the ride height 20mm and adding SUV-style wheelarches, bespoke black front and rear spoilers, and grey roof bars.

Meanwhile, the 'standard' DS4 benefits from being lowered 10mm for a low slung coupe appearance, enhanced by the hidden rear door handles carried over from before – I think it worked.

But don't get carried away with the coupe suggestion – it doesn't drive like one.

Instead, the DS makeover favoured ride quality, edging towards the glide of the original 1955-vintage Citroën 'Dee Ess'.

It still won't please 'Citroënistas' but it does strike a good balance between ride comfort and handling, even if the DS4 cannot match the driving sensations of likely rivals such as the BMW 1 Series, Audi A3 Sportback, or new MINI 5-dr hatch.

And although it has a better than average boot for the class, rear passengers may feel a little claustrophobic due to the coupe-style upswept window and raked roof and the fact that the rear windows do not open.

But the DS4 claims the high ground on class with value: it is an arresting car to look at inside and out, with lots of kit, plus customising options adding to its appeal with 'desire to be different' buyers, who will love the distinctive 'watch strap' design leather seats available on the range.

It all supports the DS pitch as a premium brand sitting above both Citroën and Peugeot in the French PSA group – it's already huge in China – though the car's Achilles Heel is a fairly ordinary dash carried over from the Citroën version.

As the DS4 though, it does become the first PSA vehicle to offer Apple CarPlay compatibility with devices from the US computing giant.

Engines? They are all good, though the diesels dominate and the test car's 2.0-litre (180bhp) Blue HDi unit is particularly smooth and eco-friendly miserly, even when mated with an auto 'box – a responsive six-speeder.

The lightweight entry-level 1.2 (130bhp) three-cylinder petrol unit makes a compelling case on price and running costs though.

DS 4 Prestige Blue HDi 180 Auto

Price:	from £25,495
Driving appeal:	★★★
Image:	★★★★
Space:	★★★
Value:	★★★★
Running costs:	★★★★
How green?:	★★★★
Best rival:	MINI 5-dr

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Fuel consumption in mpg (l/100km) for the All-New Kia Sportage range: Urban 28.2 (10.0) – 52.3 (5.4), Extra Urban 43.5 (6.5) – 67.3 (4.2), Combined 37.2 (7.6) – 61.4 (4.6), CO_2 emissions 177 – 119g/km. MPG figures are official EU test figures for comparative purposes and may not reflect real driving results. Model shown: All-New Kia Sportage 'GT-Line' 1.6 T-GDi 174bhp 6-speed manual (AWD). 7 year / 100,000 mile manufacturer's warranty. For full terms and exclusions visit www.kia.co.uk. *Free-of-charge Care-3 available at participating dealers for new car orders placed between 5th and 29th February 2016 and registered before 31st March 2016. Customers have 31 days from their vehicle's registration date to subscribe. Care-3 consists of three first services. Care-3 offer available to private customers only.

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KENT LIFE

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- Awareness and understanding of the importance of confidentiality within the organisation, demonstrating discretion at all times
- Travel for meetings as and when required
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To discuss this opportunity, or to arrange an informal visit, please contact:
The HR department, on 01304 222690

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Alternatively, please contact Mathew Thomas, HR Apprentice
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LEGAL AND PUBLIC NOTICES

Goods Vehicle Operator's Licence

Matthew Bullard and Ashley Andrews trading as MB Recovery Services of 4 Montgomery Way, Folkestone, CT19 6LL is applying to change an existing licence as follows. To add an operating centre to keep 3 goods vehicles and 0 trailers at Unit G2, Lympne Distribution Park, Otter Pool Lane, Hythe, Kent CT21 4LR.

.Owners or occupiers of land (including buildings) near the operating centre(s) who believe that their use or enjoyment of that land would be affected, should make written representations to the Traffic Commissioner at Hillcrest House, 386 Harehills Lane, Leeds, LS9 6NF, stating their reasons, within 21 days of this notice. Representors must at the same time send a copy of their representations to the applicant at the address given at the top of this notice. A Guide to Making Representations is available from the Traffic Commissioner's office.

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SAY anything WITH SMALL ADS

McMahon delight at striker's impact

The 32-year-old has scored three goals already for Ebbsfleet

Football

By Tom Pyman
tom.pyman@archant.co.uk

EBBSFLEET United boss Daryl McMahon has praised the immediate impact January signing Aaron McLean has had on the club.

The striker - who brings with him a wealth of experience from the Football League - has hit the ground running at Stonebridge Road since joining from Barnet at the end of last month, coming off the bench to score the winner on his debut at Basingstoke.

The 32-year-old then followed up that cameo with a brace on his first start for Fleet last weekend, in a 2-1 win over Bishop's Stortford.

McMahon made no secret of his admiration for the former Peterborough United striker, who also has a Premier League appearance with Hull City under his belt.

He told KoS: "He's come in and done extremely well - you can't argue with three goals in just over 90 minutes of football in total.

"You can see he's quality and that he's played at a good level.

"It's not just the goals, he's a great lad to have around the place and his attitude is spot on because he's so driven and dedicated.

"He hasn't come in and gone 'look at what I've achieved', he's here to show how good he is as a player, and help us get to where we want to be with his experience."

The signing of McLean represented a real statement of intent from Ebbsfleet, who have sat at the summit of the National League South table for the vast majority of the season, and are firm favourites to achieve promotion back to the National League.

With the likes of Matt Godden finding the net on a regular basis over the Christmas period in particular, one could have argued there was no desperate need for another striker.

But McMahon said there was no risk of him and his players resting on their laurels.

"If you're not moving forward, you're standing still," he said.

"We don't look at ourselves being that far ahead, because lots of the teams around us have got games in hand, so we can't be complacent.

"We've just got to keep doing what we're doing and hope we get the rewards come the end of the season."

STONEBRIDGE: Ebbsfleet United's home ground

Hennon fight on hold after injury setback

Boxing

SNODLAND welterweight George Hennon has had to pull out of his upcoming bout with Fonz Alexander after suffering a back injury.

The unbeaten 21-year-old was scheduled to fight at the Grays Civic Hall on March 4 but is now set to be out of action until May.

He said: "Me and my coach decided after it got to a point, where physically it was hurting to punch, that the best thing to do was rest, have a couple of weeks off and look to go again when I feel better.

"I'm only 21 and there's no point in me overdoing it and making the injury worse now.

"That is one of the main reasons we pulled out of this fight."

The injury appears to be linked with another back problem Hennon has been dealing with for over the year, and while it may well keep him out of the ring for a couple of months, the 147-pounder is determined to get back to the Peacock Gym in Canning Town where he trains with Johnny and Frank Greaves.

Hennon said: "I want to get back in the gym within the next two weeks.

"Obviously I'll start slowly, nothing too heavy, and I'm hoping to be back to proper training by the end of the month; I'll play it by ear.

"It's extremely frustrating. In my eyes, [Alexander] was the perfect opponent for me, which is gutting.

"His style suits my way of fighting, so I was really looking forward to the fight which makes the injury even more of a shame but we'll definitely look for that fight again."

OUT: George Hennon

Sport Shorts

» Email **sports@kosmedia.co.uk** or call **Tom Pyman** on **01233653477**

Wicketkeeper Billings gets England T20 call

KENT wicketkeeper Sam Billings has been named in England's 15-man squad for the ICC World T20.

The tournament kicks off in India next month and the 24-year-old has enjoyed a whirlwind few weeks having also recently signed a contract extension at Canterbury and signed a deal to play in the IPL.

England's campaign begins on March 16 against West Indies with South Africa, Sri Lanka and a qualifier their other opponents in the group stages.

Former Sri Lankan batsman Mahela Jayawardene will join the coaching team for the first ten days of the tournament with former England T20 captain Paul Collingwood working alongside Trevor Bayliss, Paul Farbrace and Ottis Gibson for the duration.

Andrew Strauss, director of England Cricket, said: "Mahela Jayawardene and Paul Collingwood proved very popular additions to the coaching team when they spent time with England in the UAE earlier this winter and I'm delighted that they are both able to help our T20 side."

CALL: Kent's Sam Billings

HOME: Hartsdown Park, where the Gate play their home games

Margate announce academy partnership

A PARTNERSHIP between Margate and a youth academy has been announced to help enhance the development of young players across the county.

M&M Academy, currently headed up by Leyton Orient midfielder Sammy Moore, already has over 170 children involved across the east of the county, and will join forces with the Blues' current youth set up to help children move onwards and upwards in the game.

The partnership will provide Margate with links to professional clubs and players, and chief executive Chris Pope expressed his enthusiasm about the deal.

He said: "We have been thinking about our approach to youth football for a good while and we believe we have found an answer."

£66k floodlights for Rusthall FC

A TUNBRIDGE Wells-based football club are set to officially switch on their new £66,000 floodlights next Friday.

Rusthall FC has received a £46,200 grand from the Premier League through the Football Stadia Improvement Fund (FSIF), which aims to improve the facilities of clubs at grassroots level.

The funding has enabled the club, who play at Step 6 in the Kent Invicta League, to install a new floodlight system at their Jockey Farm home, meaning Rusthall can now play matches all-year-round, without fear of postponed play due to poor lighting.

The switch-on will take place at 7pm on Friday, February 19.

Keep up-to-date with all Kent's sports news via social media on:
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FROM THE WRITER OF THE LADY IN THE VAN